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ABSTRACT

This document is a step-by-step guide to organizing a study circle program to serve as a vehicle to achieve communitywide dialogue for action and change. Part 1 provides an overview of communitywide study circle programs, with special emphasis on their operation and impact. Part 2 details the following steps in organizing a communitywide study circle program: (1) get started; (2) clarify your issue and think about discussion materials; (3) build your team; (4) develop a plan; (5) share the work of organizing study circles (plan and carry out communication; develop a budget and fund-raising plan; document and evaluate the program; recruit participants and form diverse groups; plan for actions; recruit, train, and support facilitators; plan the kickoff; find sites and handle logistics); (6) hold a round of study circles; and (7) sustain your program and expand the impact of your work. Part 3 profiles successful study circle programs in the following communities: Decatur, Georgia; Fayetteville, North Carolina; Guilderland, New York; Inglewood, California; and Springfield, Illinois. Part 4 contains appendixes presenting guidelines for involving public officials, young people, and the media in a study circle program, as well as a 17-item annotated bibliography. Fifteen sample documents, illustrations, and charts are included throughout the guide. (MN)

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A STEP-BY-STEP GUIDE

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Organizing Community-wide Dialogue for Action and Change:

A Step-by-step Guide

We dedicate this guide to the hundreds of people across the country who have invented, applied, and refined the practice of community-wide dialogue and problem solving.

Special thanks to Roberts & Kay, Inc., of Lexington, Kentucky, and the Best Practices Team for helping us understand and highlight the best practices organizers have developed to produce successful community-wide study circle programs.

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Organizing Community-wide Dialogue for Action and Change: A Step-by-step Guide was developed by the Study Circles Resource Center. SCRC is a project of the Topsfield Foundation, Inc., a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan foundation that is dedicated to advancing deliberative democracy and improving the quality of public life in the United States. SCRC carries out this mission by helping communities to organize study circles – small-group, democratic, highly participatory discussions that give everyday people opportunities to make a difference in their communities. We provide advice, networking, and how-to materials (including study circle guides on a variety of issues).

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The companion piece to this guide is:
A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators

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1

AN OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY-WIDE STUDY CIRCLES

Organizing
Community-wide
Dialogue
for Action
and Change

STUDY CIRCLES
RESOURCE CENTER

Helping People Work Together For Creative Community Change

Introduction – Using This Guide

Congratulations! You have just taken on the task of organizing a community-wide study circle program. You may be starting a program from scratch, reinvigorating a stalled one, or joining the program in mid-process. You are an experienced organizer, or you are fairly new to community work. You know your mission: Recruit and organize a large number of people from diverse backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences into community-wide study circles. Now what? This is a question asked by many people and the impetus for writing this guide.

Organizing community-wide study circles is not an easy task, but with a little help you can be successful. Dozens of people – just like you – have organized successful community-wide study circle programs in communities all over the country. This guide includes their suggestions, experiences, and questions.

This guide can be used in several ways. Read through it to get an understanding of the principles of study circle organizing. Use it as you develop an organizing strategy, and keep it with you to refer to questions, tips, and sample documents on an ongoing basis. Share parts of it with those who are working with you to organize the program. (Remember, no one person can do this alone.)

Organizing community-wide study circles is more art than science. An effective program is organized to fit the flavor of the community and the specifics of the issue. Yet many organizers have faced challenges similar to your own; we offer their lessons as a *guide.* Adapt their tools to meet your community's needs.

Using this guide

Organizing a community-wide study circle program is a complex undertaking. Many things will be happening at the same time: coalition building, communication and publicity, recruiting participants, training facilitators, fund raising, planning for action, and more. This guide is designed to help you understand and carry out the many aspects of community-wide organizing for public dialogue and action.

The purpose of this guide is to help you organize a large-scale, community-wide study circle program. In such a program, many study circles meet at the same time across a community, to examine an important public issue and develop strategies to address it. Community-wide study circle programs are usually carried out by a broad coalition of community organizations and people. They are often staffed by a coordinator and assisted by many volunteers.

We hope that the guide will be particularly useful in four stages of your work:

- at the very beginning, when you are getting an idea of what it will take to organize a community-wide program;
- when you have assembled a committed working group, and are actively working to develop an organizing plan;
- as committees of the working group are implementing their piece of the work plan (parts of the guide are designed as stand-alone pieces to copy and share with these committees.)
- throughout the development of your program, as specific organizing challenges arise. For these, we hope that you will use the guide as a reference tool to help answer specific questions.

Part 1 provides an overview of community-wide study circle programs. What are they? What do they accomplish? What is the scope of the study circle movement?

Part 2 begins with an overview of the basic steps in organizing a community-wide study circle program, including a glossary of terms. It also provides suggestions and advice on *all* aspects of organizing a community-wide program.

Part 3 provides some profiles of actual study circle programs. These describe various successful organizing practices.

Part 4 contains appendices – including tips for involving the media, public officials, and young people in your program – an annotated resource list, and an index.

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Check our web site
www.st[illegible]circles.org
for additional tips
and suggestions.

◆

Contact the Study Circles Resource Center when using this guide. We offer assistance free of charge to communities that are organizing programs, and will share what we have learned from many programs around the country.

An Overview of Community-wide Study Circles

Part 1

All communities – neighborhoods, small towns, medium-sized and large metropolitan regions – face a wide array of complex challenges. Addressing those kinds of challenges calls for innovative and inclusive approaches to community problem solving.

Most people care about their communities and would like to make a difference. Many would like the chance to work with others in productive ways. Yet, it can be difficult to know where to begin and how to make progress. Often, when communities try to work together on a public problem, communication and trust break down between people and groups from different backgrounds and sectors.

People have different perspectives and experiences, and so they see the issues differently. The solutions that make sense for one person or group may not meet the needs of others. And, there are usually lots of people on the sidelines, not invited into problem solving or not knowing how to take part.

This is where community-wide study circle programs come in. These large-scale programs are designed to help all kinds of people work through the issues with each other and solve public problems through more productive ways of working together.

Many leaders and citizens are drawn to community-wide study circle programs because they provide what is usually missing in community life – a process for meaningful, face-to-face give-and-take between people from different backgrounds and views. The community-wide scope of study circle programs and the ways they link dialogue to change help ensure that many people from across a community will come to the table, and that their participation will make a difference.

Community-wide study circles can make a unique contribution to strengthening the community and solving public problems, but they are not "the only game in town." Effective community-wide study circle programs value and build on existing community work and resources. They help to multiply and strengthen other community-building efforts. Many communities are finding ways to connect their programs to other civic processes such as strategic planning, visioning, service learning, and shared governance.

The study circle process

The study circle process is not magic or mysterious. It's simply a tested set of democratic principles and tools for engaging the whole community in all its variety, bringing people together for public dialogue, and combining their ideas and resources to create and implement solutions.

A community-wide study circle program:

- is organized by a diverse coalition that reflects the whole community.
- includes a large number of participants from all walks of life.
- uses easy-to-use, nonpartisan discussion material.
- uses trained facilitators who reflect the community's diversity.
- results in specific opportunities to move to action when the study circles conclude.

The basic principles of study circle programs

Community-wide study circle programs embody democratic principles of equality, inclusiveness, and collaboration. This approach to community change is based on these ideas:

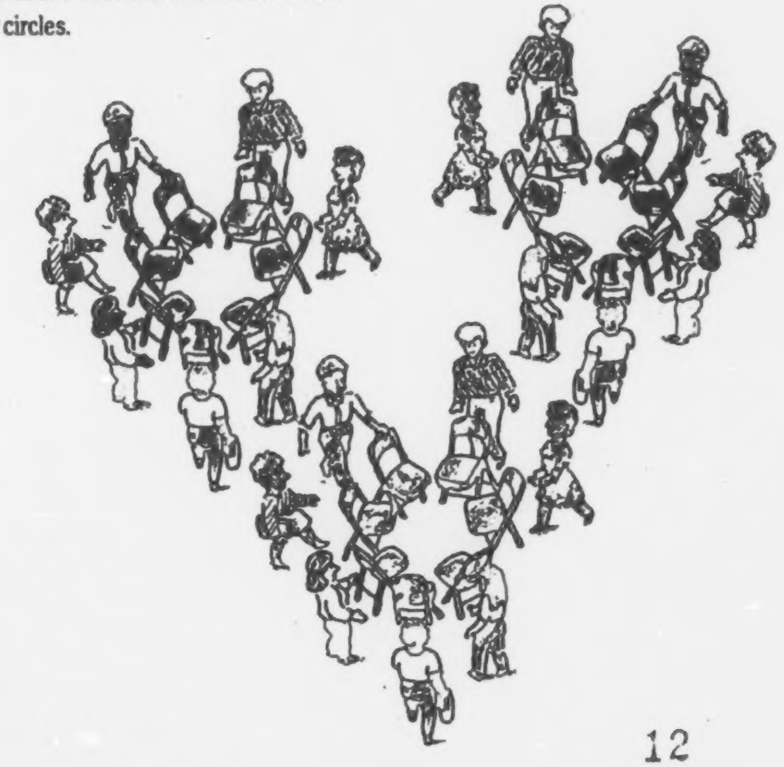
- People care about the communities they live in, and want to make them better.
- Complex problems call for many kinds of solutions.
- People from all backgrounds and all segments of society have something to contribute.
- When everybody is included in public life, everybody benefits.
- When all kinds of people develop trust and relationships through face-to-face dialogue, new ideas and approaches emerge.
- When people consider different points of view on a complex issue, they uncover common ground and find better solutions.
- When people have a voice in the public conversation, they are more likely to take part in creating and carrying out ideas for community change.
- The more people that are involved, the bigger the impact.
- Community change is more likely to last and deepen when individual and collective actions are tied together.

How do community-wide study circle programs work?

In a community-wide program, people all over a neighborhood, city, county, school district, or region meet in study circles over the same period of time. A "round" of study circles usually takes about two months, and can include from ten to fifty circles, depending on the size of the community.

All the study circles work on the same issue, and seek solutions for the whole community. At the end of a round of study circles, people from all the study circles come together in a large community meeting to work together on the action ideas that came out of all the study circles.

No single organization or person can create an effective program like this without help. To ensure diverse community-wide participation, the program organizing must be driven by a group of community leaders and organizations that represents the diversity of the whole community, not just one sector, constituency or group.



A study circle:

- is a small, diverse group of eight to twelve participants.
- meets regularly over a period of weeks or months to address a critical public issue in a democratic and collaborative way.
- sets its own ground rules for a respectful, productive discussion.
- is led by a facilitator who is impartial, who helps manage the process, but is not an "expert" or "teacher" in the traditional sense.
- considers the issue from many points of view.
- does not require consensus, but uncovers areas of agreement and common concern.
- progresses from a session on personal experience of the issue, to sessions that examine many points of view on the issue, to a session that considers strategies for action and change.

For more information about SCRC and Topsfield – our history, partnerships, publications, and services – please contact us, or go to our website: **www.studycircles.org**

Community-wide study circle programs around the country

The Topsfield Foundation created the Study Circles Resource Center in 1989 with the mission of finding ways for all kinds of people to engage in dialogue and problem solving on critical social and political issues.

Since then, SCRC has worked with many kinds of communities, on many different issues, to develop a process for bringing people together for creative community change. Hundreds of communities across the country have organized community-wide study circle programs. SCRC works directly with these communities, to refine and improve the process for organizing large-scale community dialogue that leads to action and change.

From neighborhoods to large cities, broad coalitions of community groups are bringing together hundreds (and sometimes thousands) of people from all walks of life to deal with important issues.

These coalitions are addressing such issues as: racism and race relations; education reform; crime and violence; immigration; diversity; youth concerns; growth and sprawl; police-community relations; building strong neighborhoods; and neighborhoods supporting families with children. In addition, many colleges and high schools are organizing study circles to engage young people in dialogue and problem solving.

As SCRC works with regional, state, and national organizations interested in active citizenship, study circles are becoming a more widely known and well-tested process for large-scale citizen involvement. Throughout the country, study circles are increasingly recognized as a dynamic part of what many are heralding as a new movement for strengthening democracy and community building.

The impact of community-wide study circles

Organizers of community-wide study circle programs and others in their communities are seeing the powerful results of people really talking with each other and finding ways to work together to solve public problems.

The most immediate kinds of change happen when people gain new understanding of an issue, and form new relationships – across the barriers of race, background, political ideology, income, and geography. These changes can readily translate into new individual or small-group commitments to action. Some people take their new ideas and approaches back to their organizations, and sow the seeds of institutional change.

Sometimes, people envision and create solutions that take the form of new community projects or collaborations. Or, they decide to add their energies and ideas to efforts already under way in the community. When government is part of the organizing, and elected officials take part in the study circles, this paves the way for more effective policy making and collaborative work.

Still other kinds of change that come from study circles are more complex and can take longer to take shape. These include changes such as new policies, new decisions, changes in the allocation of resources, and new processes for involving the public in solving problems. (For a description of the different ways in which study circle programs lead from dialogue to action, see "Action and Change in Study Circle Programs" on page 92.)

One study circle organizer recently summarized the impact of the process by saying, "A community that talks together is alive!" People are finding ways to lend their hearts, hands, and minds to solving public problems and building stronger communities.

Study circle outcomes

- New learning (participants see a more complete picture of the issue and of others in the community)
- New relationships and networks (across typical barriers)
- New ownership of the issue (the issue is no longer "someone else's problem")
- New leadership
- New collaborations
- New policies
- New processes for community problem solving

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To read stories about the impact of some community-wide study circle programs, see our website: **www.studycircles.org**

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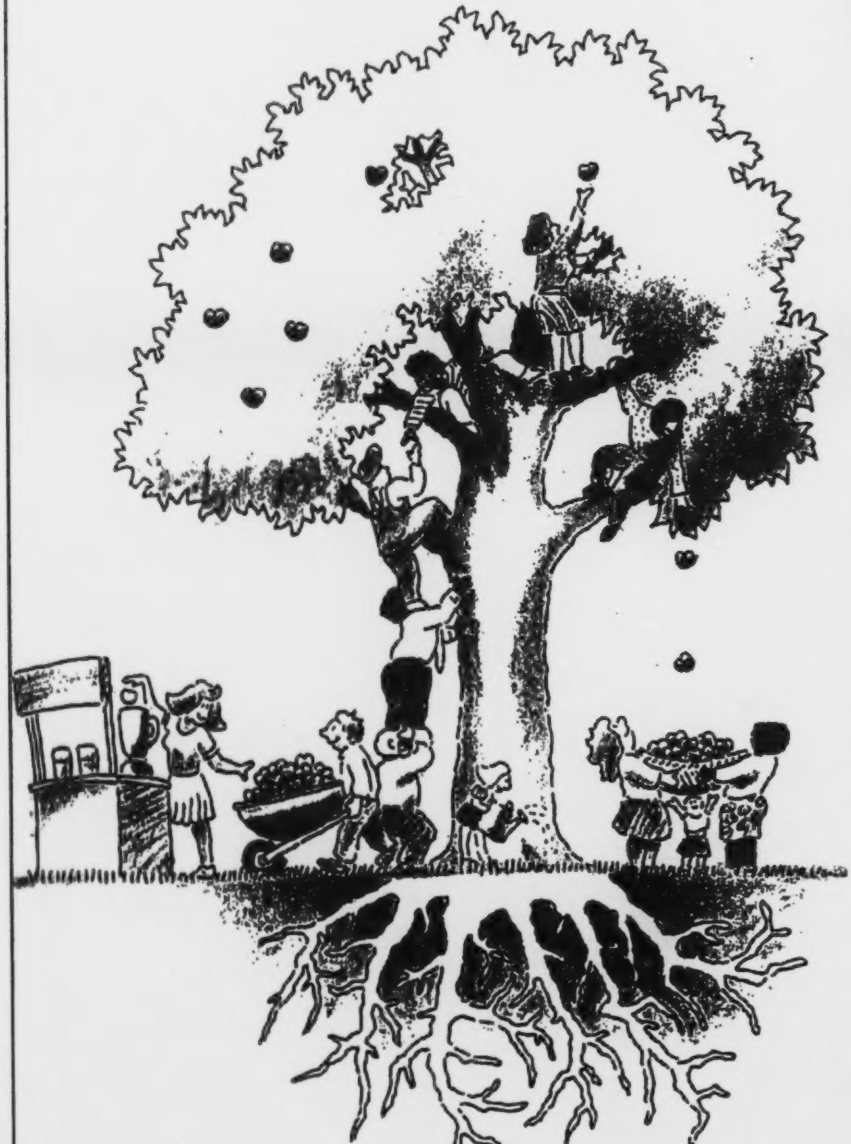
The Democracy Tree



A tree is an organism of many parts – roots, bark, leaves, trunk – joined together to make a whole, living thing.

The source of the tree's strength is the root system, and everything that comes after, as the tree grows, is supported and anchored by the roots. In study circles, the roots are the inclusive community-wide process for linking large-scale dialogue to change, and the strength of democratic, face-to-face dialogue.

As the tree grows, it develops, enlarges, and expands beyond the root system. In large-scale study circle programs, citizens move into complex problem-solving and community-building efforts – through new relationships, new leadership, new collaborations, and stronger community change efforts. The success of these efforts is rooted in both the community-wide process and the experience of each individual circle.

A fully developed study circle program is substantial – it provides a way for large numbers of community members and institutions to combine their ideas and energy for creative community change.

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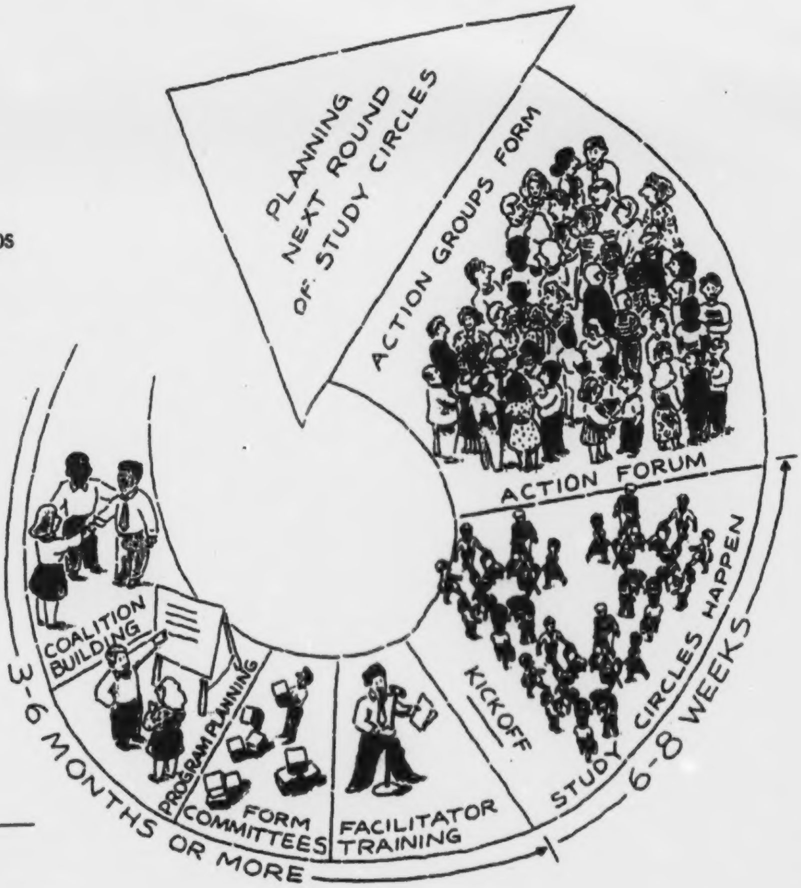
Organizing a Community-wide Study Circle Program

Part 2

Part 2 walks you through the steps of organizing a community-wide study circle program.

- Each step builds on the one before it. For example, successful recruitment and action results depend on how well you define goals, build your coalition, and develop a plan.
- Sample documents appear in some sections.
- Sections can be pulled out, copied, and given to committee members to help them work more easily as a team.
- Steps can be revisited. Most organizers find themselves going back to various steps from time to time.

The information in this guide should help you to do most of the work without direct assistance from SCRC. It shows you how to implement most of the strategies you need to launch a community-wide study circle program. Whenever you do need our advice or assistance, we encourage you to call us.


PLANNING NEXT ROUND OF STUDY CIRCLES
ACTION GROUPS FORM
ACTION FORUM
STUDY CIRCLES HAPPEN
KICKOFF
FACILITATOR TRAINING
FORM COMMITTEES
PROGRAM PLANNING
COALITION BUILDING
3-6 MONTHS OR MORE
6-8 WEEKS

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Visit
www.studycircles.org
for the latest news from community-wide programs and updated information for organizing your program.

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The Basic Steps of Organizing

Step 1: ***Get Started***

- Build an initial working group, and hold a pilot circle
- Talk about what study circles could accomplish for your community

Step 2: ***Clarify Your Issue and Think About Discussion Materials***

- Clarify your issue
- Decide whether you need to create your own discussion materials
- Set up a guide-development committee
- Contact SCRC for advice
- Recruit outside help if you need it

Step 3: ***Build Your Team***

Build a Strong, Diverse Working Group and Organizing Coalition
Identify a Coordinator and Establish Clear Areas of Responsibility

Step 4: ***Develop a Plan***

- Talk about why it is important to engage the community in dialogue and problem solving on this issue
- Define the goals of your program
- Decide on geographic scope
- Consider how you will achieve diversity in the circles
- Decide what support you will provide for action ideas
- Talk about resources – what you have, and what you need
- Develop a written work plan
- Make sure there is effective communication among all those involved in the work

Step 5: ***Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles***

Plan and Carry Out Communication
Develop a Budget and Plan for Fund Raising
Document and Evaluate Your Program
Recruit Participants and Form Diverse Groups
Plan for Action, Including the Action Forum
Recruit, Train, and Support Facilitators
Plan the Kickoff
Find Sites and Handle Logistics

Step 6: ***Hold a Round of Study Circles***

- Hold the kickoff
- Conduct the study circles
- Have the action forum, and support and track action efforts

Step 7: ***Sustain Your Program and Expand the Impact of Your Work***

- Refer back to your initial program goals, and have a conversation about the future
- Share ownership of the program
- Support the coordinator
- Make sure to communicate your successes to the larger community
- Take care of yourselves and support one another

Glossary of study circle terms

Action forum – the large-group meeting at the end of a round of study circles designed to pool the action ideas from individual study circles.

Coordinator – the staff person (sometimes two to three people) at the hub of the organizing effort, who keeps track of, supports, and manages the overall program.

Facilitator – the person who acts as an impartial guide for a single study circle. Many programs use co-facilitators.

Facilitator trainer – the person or group with responsibility for training and preparing others to facilitate study circles.

Organizer(s) – people with primary responsibility for organizing the program. This often includes the coordinator and members of the working group.

Participants – the community members who take part in the study circles.

Pilot study circles – a small number of study circles used to acquaint people with the process, provide practice for the facilitators, and expand coalition membership. Some organizers conduct a pilot round of study circles to try out organizing strategies before taking the program to full scale.

Sponsoring coalition – the group of organizations committed to recruiting participants and supporting the program in many ways. The coalition includes the working group.

Task force or action group – a new group that forms following an action forum to carry forward an action idea.

Working group (some communities call this the *core group*, or *steering committee*) – the close-knit group of five to fifteen people who are most actively involved in making the program happen.

Get Started

Step 1

Even the most extensive community-wide study circle programs begin with small steps. This section will help you take those steps.

What to do

- Build an initial working group, and hold a pilot study circle.
- Talk about what study circles could accomplish for your community.

How to do it

A note about discussion materials:

Obviously, you'll need some discussion materials for this first session. If you will be discussing an issue for which SCRC has a guide (see the list on page 15), you are welcome to photocopy our guides or download them from our website at **www.studycircles.org.** If you are discussing an issue for which there is no pre-existing study circle guide, see Step 2.

◆ Build an initial working group, and hold a pilot study circle.

Make a list of ten to fifteen people who would agree that the issue you are working on is an important one facing the community. In this list, include people from diverse backgrounds, and people with different views about the issue.

Make personal invitations to the people on your list. Invite them to try out one or two study circle sessions. Find someone who can serve as a neutral facilitator. This pilot study circle will acquaint you with the process, help you examine the issue in a facilitated discussion setting, and strengthen the relationships among key people. After this, you will have a much better sense of the potential for change if study circles like this were happening all across the community.

◆ Talk about what study circles could accomplish for your community.

At the end of the sample study circle, talk about the process, and about the potential for a study circle program in the community. As a group, share your ideas about why it is important to engage the whole community in addressing the issue you've been talking about in this study circle.

It's important for those of you who are interested in carrying forward the idea of a study circle program to discuss what the broad goals of a program would be. This conversation will lead you directly into the work of Step 2. In the box to the right, you will find a few questions to guide your decisions. You may revisit them from time to time.

Questions for initial goal setting:

- ➲ What is happening in our community that concerns us?
- ➲ Is this issue relevant to a large portion of the community? Would all kinds of people come out for study circles on this issue?
- ➲ What is the geographic area we are trying to impact?
- ➲ What are we trying to accomplish? Why would study circles help?
- ➲ How could we describe the issue and the program so that it will interest lots of diverse people?
- ➲ What are the broad and specific goals we are aiming to achieve?
- ➲ Who should lead the program? Who else should be involved?
- ➲ Who is already working on this issue? Who else is affected by the issue?
- ➲ What is the right timing for this program? Are there other things going on in the community that would have an impact on the timing of the study circles?
- ➲ What kinds of resources will it take to organize the program?

Clarify Your Issue and Think About Discussion Materials

Step 2

Like most people who organize community-wide study circles, you have probably identified an issue (or set of issues) that you think your community needs – and wants – to address. While there are many important issues and causes, not all of them lend themselves to large-scale community-wide dialogue and problem solving.

This section helps you think about how to:

- ⊃ make sure that the issue you select has broad appeal and is important to all sorts of people.
- ⊃ find – or write – a study circle guide.

What to do

- ◆ Clarify your issue.
- ◆ Decide whether you need to create your own discussion materials.
- ◆ Set up a guide-development committee.
- ◆ Contact SCRC for advice.
- ◆ Recruit outside help if you need it.

How to do it

◆ Clarify your issue.

Have a discussion with your working group about the issue that brought you together. Does it have broad appeal? Does it feel important to all sorts of people in the community? To find out, do some "grass-roots research" about the issue:

- Talk to everyday people – for example, neighbors, kids, grandparents, librarians, shop clerks, taxi drivers, and waiters.
- Read the local paper, and follow the local news. The opinion and editorial pages can be a great resource. Also, consider talking with journalists or the editor of the local newspaper, and ask them about the kinds of views they hear on the issue.
- Talk to local leaders – for example, public officials, business people, religious leaders, activists, and teachers.

Defining or naming the issue is essential. For example, does a large cross section of the community want to look at racism and race relations, or are people actually searching for ways to address how immigration and diversity are affecting schools, language differences, and competition for jobs? All sorts of issues are important, and many of them lend themselves to large-scale organizing. When you first meet, take the time to come up with a definition of the issue on which you can all agree. Decide how to describe the issue so people from all parts of the community will know that the study circles will address their concerns. If you are having trouble with defining your issue, please contact us.

Issues that work best for a community-wide program....

- relate to the concerns and daily lives of many different types of people in the community.
- capture widespread public attention because they are timely.
- relate to the welfare of the whole community – that is, they are public issues.
- connect to institutions and public policy.
- provide possibilities for making an immediate and visible impact.
- have the potential for making long-term institutional and policy change.

Step 2

◆ **Decide whether you need to create your own study circle materials.**

If SCRC has published a guide on your issue, we recommend that you consider using it. These guides for public dialogue and problem solving are designed and field-tested to appeal to a broad and diverse cross section of people. SCRC discussion guides are available for many issues, including:

- racism and race relations
- education and schools
- growth and development
- immigration
- criminal justice
- building strong neighborhoods
- building strong neighborhoods for families with children
- community-police relationships
- crime and violence
- diversity
- youth issues

Some of these discussion guides are available in Spanish.

Most community-wide programs use SCRC guides because they have been proven to work, and because using them saves valuable time and resources. At the very least, try to use an SCRC guide in any pilot study circles you hold for your coalition and working group. This will give you a much better feel for how study circle guides should work before you make a decision about whether or not to write your own materials.

Good study circle discussion material should...

- cover a broad range of views, and present each viewpoint in the voice of a reasonable person who supports the view.
- encourage people to examine the basic assumptions and values that underlie their own views, and help people understand each other's views.
- connect personal experience with public issues, and give people a sense that their experiences count.
- provide a baseline of information about the issue, while being careful not to overwhelm people with too many facts.
- follow a multiple-session sequence that starts by allowing people to talk about how the issue affects them, then considers some of the larger questions surrounding the issue, and finally discusses ways to take action on the issue.
- convey the idea that, by talking and working together, we'll gain a more accurate picture than we can by ourselves.
- help people find common ground.
- help people move to action.

As you think about whether to create your own discussion materials, consider the following pros and cons:

Pros:

Why it can make sense to create your own study circle guide

- ➲ You have not been able to find a published guide that meets your community's needs.
- ➲ You have found a published guide that meets most of your needs, but you could still use a new session (as an add-on or substitute) that speaks more directly to your community's unique circumstances.
- ➲ Your sponsoring coalition and/or working group will not feel "ownership" of the program unless they have had a strong hand in creating the discussion materials.

Cons:

Possible drawbacks to creating your own study circle guide

- ➲ The process can be much more difficult and time-consuming than it first appears. Creating your own materials will add *at least* two months to your start-up schedule. You may also need to find additional money to pay for researchers, writers, editors, graphic artists, and printing.
- ➲ The time spent by your coalition in creating materials could otherwise be spent on essential tasks such as strengthening the coalition, recruiting and training facilitators, recruiting participants, fundraising, etc.

If you decide that you need to create your own materials, move on to the following steps.

◆ **Set up a guide-development committee.**

At a minimum, you will need at least one person with strong writing skills. The best writers of study circle guides are people who can translate complex ideas into clear, simple language without using jargon. Journalists, for example, are usually good at this sort of writing.

It is also important that the main writer has a few people to help "frame" the issue and review the materials as they develop. Try not to make the group too big, or the process will become unwieldy. The committee members don't have to be experts on the issue, but it is helpful if they are quick learners who can appreciate different perspectives and approaches, even ones they don't agree with. (In fact, issue experts can have trouble creating study circle materials because it can be difficult for them to look at the issue from the perspective of everyday people.)

If you are creating a single discussion session or fact sheet to supplement an existing study circle guide, your task will be much simpler than if you are creating an entire discussion guide. If you are creating a whole guide, you may also want to recruit someone to help with research, and someone to provide editorial support.

Focusing on the local issues

Supplementing or adapting an SCRC guide may help you focus the discussion on your local situation, and help people see how the study circles will lead to community change.

Fact sheets or ***brief companion readings*** can provide basic information on the issue and how it has affected the community, what local government is doing about it, what businesses are doing, what service organizations and nonprofits are doing, and what volunteers can do to help.

◆ **Contact SCRC for advice.**

SCRC staff are available to provide advice and editorial guidance. We would be happy to brainstorm with you as you try to outline the material and frame the issue. We can also read and comment on any drafts that you send us.

Also, feel free to borrow ideas and actual words from our published guides. We encourage you to use them. We request, however, that you ask for our written permission and credit the source. Our main concern is that the final product is consistent with study circles principles; for example, your study circle discussion guide should not advocate a particular point of view or solution.

It may be that another community has developed its own study circle materials on the same issue you have selected. If so, we would be glad to share a copy of their materials with you. Though these are often tailored to the concerns of a specific community, the structure of the guide may help you as you develop your own.

◆ **Recruit outside help if you need it.**

Some study circle programs may hire professional writers and researchers to develop their discussion materials. If your program decides to do this, contact SCRC for advice on where to start looking.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. **Do we really need formal discussion materials? Can't we just develop some questions and some readings?** We wouldn't advise this. One of the main reasons study circles are effective is because they are guided and informed by materials that help move the discussion from the personal connection, to the larger issue, to action. The discussion materials should offer enough structure that people feel as if they are getting somewhere in the conversation.

2. **How can we make the SCRC guide fit our community?** Provide a fact sheet with information that is specific to your community. Include statistics, demographics, graphics, news stories, etc. Or, develop a session to be used in conjunction with an SCRC guide. For example, many communities addressing education-reform issues have added sessions on parental involvement or closing the gap in minority achievement to SCRC's education guide.

Build Your Team

Step 3

Build a Strong, Diverse Working Group and Organizing Coalition

The purpose of community-wide study circle programs is to address community issues by bringing together large numbers of people who represent the diversity of viewpoints, backgrounds, and experiences in your community. To successfully recruit diverse participants and then move to action, a community-wide study circle program needs to be sponsored and led by a strong, diverse working group and organizing coalition.

Building this kind of collaboration takes time and effort, but it's worth it. There's lots of evidence to suggest that the most effective study circles are initiated and sustained by broad-based, cross-sector coalitions that keep learning and growing.

This section will explain how to develop a coalition that will:

- recruit the different kinds of people and groups you want in your study circles.
- provide resources and skills to help organize the program.
- help the program move from dialogue to action.

What to do

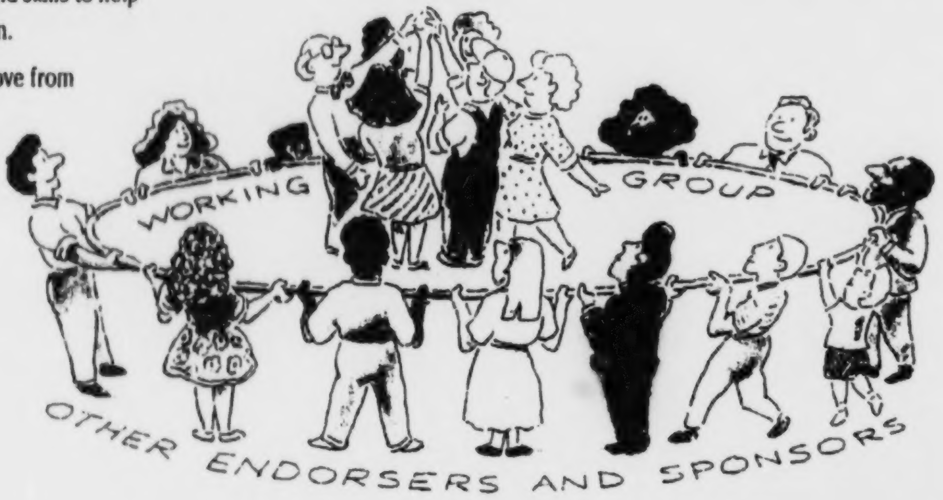
- Establish a diverse working group.
- Identify key people and organizations to recruit into the sponsoring coalition.
- Recruit coalition members – explain why they should get involved, and how.
- Conduct pilot study circles among new and potential coalition members.
- Help your coalition work as a team.

Recruiting for diversity

A diverse coalition is essential to recruit a diversity of participants. An evaluation of one program showed that although a great deal of publicity had been done, most of the participants took part in study circles because someone they trusted *asked them* to take part.

Laying the groundwork

Before you proceed with program planning, it's essential to start by building a strong, diverse core coalition. The success of your program will depend on how well you've laid that groundwork.



How to do it

♦ Establish a diverse working group.

In most cases, there is a working group (sometimes called the *steering committee or core working group*). Typically, representatives from five to fifteen community organizations, businesses, government or institutions make up the working group, with many more organizations – sometimes as many as 100 – in the broader, organizing coalition. It is this smaller group of individuals *within* the coalition who take more direct responsibility for the effort. Diversity within this core group is key, since this group is the most visible representation of the program to the community.

♦ Identify key people and organizations to recruit into the sponsoring coalition.

- Keeping your program goals in mind, create a list of the kinds of people and groups you want to include in the study circles. (Consider race and ethnicity, income, religion, age, gender, views, geography, old timers/newcomers, political affiliation, occupation.) For each category, create a list of people and organizations that can help you reach this constituency. Consider informal leaders, grass-roots leaders, and high visibility leaders in the community. As you are making your list of potential coalition members, keep asking yourselves, "Who is missing?"
- Again looking at goals, create a list of the kinds of resources you will need in order to create your program. (Consider staffing needs, administrative assistance, meeting sites, trainers, facilitators, public relations experience, evaluation assistance, and fundraising experience.) For each category in your list, think about groups and people who might provide these resources and consider their work on the study circle coalition a natural part of their own mission.
- Think about who can help implement the kinds of action ideas that are likely to come from the study circles. Consider policymakers, people from government agencies, and leaders from key community institutions.

♦ Recruit coalition members – explain why they should get involved, and how.

- ***Create a simple "pitch"*** that explains why the people or organizations you're talking to should get involved, and what you're asking them to do. A good pitch describes the program in brief and says what you believe the program will accomplish in the community. Think about how you will communicate this to different kinds of community groups.

Leadership "mapping"

In Decatur, Georgia, program planners charted the location of key organizations, institutions and associations on a map of the community. Each category was represented by a different color to reflect the type of asset it provided the community. This helped the planners see where they needed more community connections, and also helped them to envision the variety of leadership assets. They used the map in community presentations to build interest in the study circles. The map helped people all over Decatur get a better sense of the entire community working together.

Informal leaders

Many people in a community are leaders in an informal sense. They may not have a title, or even be affiliated with a particular group. Yet they are trusted as good community members, and people in their neighborhood often turn to them.

Make sure that you explain the study circle process – and the program – in a way that the people you are talking to will understand it. To do this, think about their mission and their goals. What do they care about? Help them see how getting involved in the study circles will help them advance their organization's mission or meet their constituents' needs. (See "Develop talking points" on page 40 for additional tips.)

Your letters and any other written materials should send a clear, straightforward message that people from all parts of the community will understand. Be sure to include contact information.

➲ ***Develop a task list for coalition members.*** Make a list of the many ways coalition members can be involved in the program. Provide a variety, so they can find something that fits their available time and resources. (See the sample sponsor sign-up sheet at the end of this section for the many ways that sponsors can support a program.)

➲ ***Use a variety of recruitment methods.*** The most effective method of recruitment is a ***personal invitation***. Consider one-on-one meetings, phone calls, and letters (a combination works best). (See a sample invitation letter at the end of this section.)

Ask members of the working group to use their connections to help reach a broad cross section of the community. When inviting people you don't know very well, send information on the program, but don't count on a letter alone. You'll need to make follow-up phone calls so people will know you're really interested in their participation.

Most communities find that ***coalition-building meetings*** are an effective way to reach large numbers of potential coalition members at one time. Be sure to invite people who represent a range of views on the issue. In the meeting, give an overview of what the study circle program might look like. Give people a chance to participate in a brief sample study circle if time permits. (See the coalition-building meeting agenda in the sample documents at the end of this section.)

Remember to include public officials, young people, and the media in your working group or organizing coalition. (See Appendices A, B and C for specific suggestions.)

Making your pitch

Include these basic ideas:

- This is a nonpartisan effort – you are not pushing one view over another.
- You are working to involve people from different backgrounds, views, and experiences.
- The dialogue will move to action.

Making cold calls

- Call to introduce yourself. (It helps if someone who knows the person calls first to lay the groundwork – or lets you use his or her name.)
- Explain why his or her participation is important.
- Ask if you can send information about the program.
- Follow up with a phone call to answer questions.

♦ Conduct pilot study circles among new and potential coalition members.

It's a good idea for new coalition members to go through a pilot study circle together. This will help them build strong working relationships and a commitment to the program, and will make them better prepared to recruit participants. A pilot circle also gives potential coalition members a chance to decide whether they want to join the effort.

If key members of the coalition can't take time to do all the sessions of a guide, consider setting aside some time to do several sessions. Find people in the community with facilitation experience to lead these discussions. (Consult SCRC's *Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*, or see any SCRC study circle guide for facilitation advice.)

Be sure the coalition addresses:

- Roles and responsibilities
- Decision-making processes
- Internal communication
- "Turf" issues
- Fiscal management
- Sharing credit for the work

♦ Help your coalition work as a team.

Remember to incorporate study circle principles of inclusiveness, collaboration, and active listening in all your planning and decision making. Consider what makes an effective coalition and think together about how you will do the following:

- ⊃ develop trust
- ⊃ set common goals
- ⊃ develop clear expectations of each other
- ⊃ provide for ways to fine-tune the way you work together throughout the life of the program

Collaboration and team building are important to all kinds of community initiatives, and there are many excellent resources on these subjects. (For a listing of some of these, see "Resources" on pages 143-145.)

Here are some suggestions for making your coalition meetings productive:

- ⊃ At the first meeting, establish a schedule for the remainder of the meetings.
- ⊃ Keep the meeting agenda focused. Stick to the tasks that involve the *whole* coalition. Many tasks can be assigned to committees, who can report back to the whole coalition.
- ⊃ If many new coalition members have joined the program since your last coalition meeting, you may want to consider holding a brief orientation before a regularly scheduled meeting to explain the program and bring newcomers up to speed.
- ⊃ Send minutes out right after the meeting; be sure to summarize the decisions and remind people of the tasks they have taken on.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. **How big should the coalition be?** In most cases, representatives from five to ten community organizations, businesses, government, or institutions make up the "working group," with many more organizations – sometimes as many as 100 – in the broader, sponsoring coalition. *The diversity of the working group is crucial to attracting a diverse coalition.*

2. **How long does it take to build a strong coalition?** It pays to take time to establish trust and build strong relationships. It may take several months to hold pilot study circles and get key organizations on board.

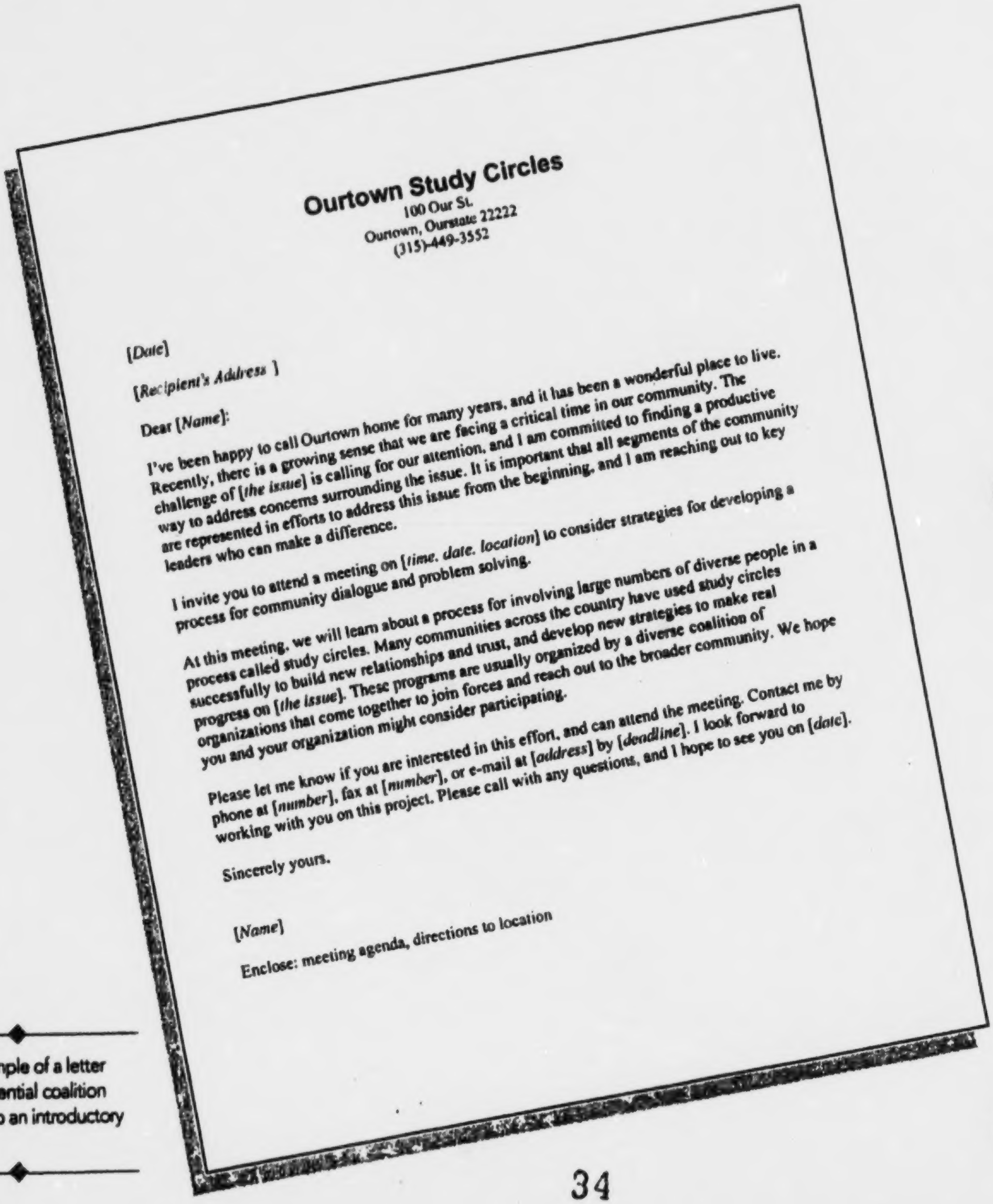
3. **How do we involve organizations whose views on the issue differ from ours?** Put yourself in their shoes. Help them see how participating in this program will advance the mission of their own organization and/or meet their constituents' needs. It's also important to make it clear that this program is for everyone, and that bringing in different views will lead to more lasting, workable solutions. Emphasize that it is important for their voices to be part of the conversation.

4. **Who will facilitate pilot study circles for the coalition members?** Find someone with facilitation background. (Those with conflict resolution or mediation training would be well suited to the task.) To understand the differences between study circle facilitation and other types of facilitation, she or he should read the issue guide you will be using and study the facilitator guidelines in that guide.)

5. **What is the best way to organize pilot study circles for coalition members?** There are many ways to do this. If you don't have much time, hold a sample study circle in forty-five minutes. This will give people a sense of the process. If you can convince people to come for a half day, they'll get a better idea of how the sessions progress. Some groups want to experience the entire process. This means setting aside eight to ten hours, either in one block of time, or over a period of two to four weeks. In any case, *experiencing* the study circle is the point. It leads to better understanding and more commitment from coalition members.

6. **How do we know when our coalition is complete enough to move forward with program planning?** Take a good look at the central members of your working group and coalition. Are they strong organizations with a real commitment to your project? Do they come from different sectors and parts of the community (government, business, nonprofit, neighborhood organizations, etc.)? Do they include diverse points of view and diverse populations (race, income, age, and gender)? As a group, do they have the resources to advance this project? If you've answered yes to these questions, you've brought the right people together. Take time to experience a study circle, and build strong relationships among these key players. Remember that coalition building is an ongoing process, but success will depend, in part, on these connections that are established early in the life of the program.

Sample Document: Invitation to Coalition-Building Meeting



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315)-449-3552

[*Date*]

[*Recipient's Address*]

Dear [*Name*]:

I've been happy to call Ourtown home for many years, and it has been a wonderful place to live. Recently, there is a growing sense that we are facing a critical time in our community. The challenge of [*the issue*] is calling for our attention, and I am committed to finding a productive way to address concerns surrounding the issue. It is important that all segments of the community are represented in efforts to address this issue from the beginning, and I am reaching out to key leaders who can make a difference.

I invite you to attend a meeting on [*time, date, location*] to consider strategies for developing a process for community dialogue and problem solving.

At this meeting, we will learn about a process for involving large numbers of diverse people in a process called study circles. Many communities across the country have used study circles successfully to build new relationships and trust, and develop new strategies to make real progress on [*the issue*]. These programs are usually organized by a diverse coalition of organizations that come together to join forces and reach out to the broader community. We hope you and your organization might consider participating.

Please let me know if you are interested in this effort, and can attend the meeting. Contact me by phone at [*number*], fax at [*number*], or e-mail at [*address*] by [*deadline*]. I look forward to working with you on this project. Please call with any questions, and I hope to see you on [*date*].

Sincerely yours,

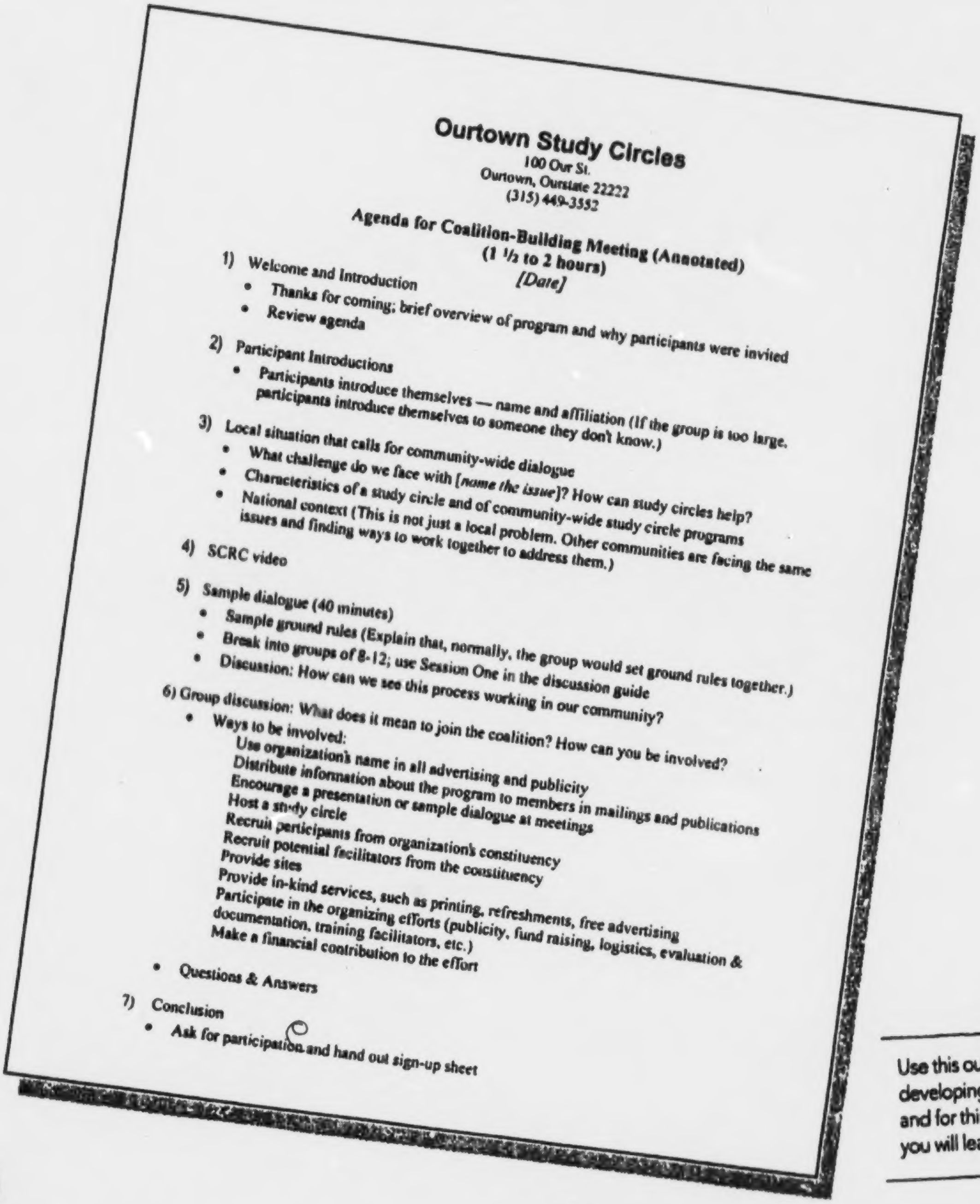
[*Name*]

Enclose: meeting agenda, directions to location

This is a sample of a letter inviting potential coalition members to an introductory meeting.

Step 3

Sample Document: Agenda for Coalition-Building Meeting (Annotated)



Ourtown Study Circles

100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Agenda for Coalition-Building Meeting (Annotated)
(1 ½ to 2 hours)
[Date]

1) Welcome and Introduction
   - Thanks for coming; brief overview of program and why participants were invited
   - Review agenda

2) Participant Introductions
   - Participants introduce themselves — name and affiliation (If the group is too large, participants introduce themselves to someone they don't know.)

3) Local situation that calls for community-wide dialogue
   - What challenge do we face with [*name the issue*]? How can study circles help?
   - Characteristics of a study circle and of community-wide study circle programs
   - National context (This is not just a local problem. Other communities are facing the same issues and finding ways to work together to address them.)

4) SCRC video

5) Sample dialogue (40 minutes)
   - Sample ground rules (Explain that, normally, the group would set ground rules together.)
   - Break into groups of 8-12; use Session One in the discussion guide
   - Discussion: How can we see this process working in our community?

6) Group discussion: What does it mean to join the coalition? How can you be involved?
   - Ways to be involved:
     Use organization's name in all advertising and publicity
     Distribute information about the program to members in mailings and publications
     Encourage a presentation or sample dialogue at meetings
     Host a study circle
     Recruit participants from organization's constituency
     Recruit potential facilitators from the constituency
     Provide sites
     Provide in-kind services, such as printing, refreshments, free advertising
     Participate in the organizing efforts (publicity, fund raising, logistics, evaluation & documentation, training facilitators, etc.)
     Make a financial contribution to the effort
   - Questions & Answers

7) Conclusion
   - Ask for participation and hand out sign-up sheet

◆

Use this outline as a guide for developing your own agenda and for thinking about how you will lead this meeting.

◆

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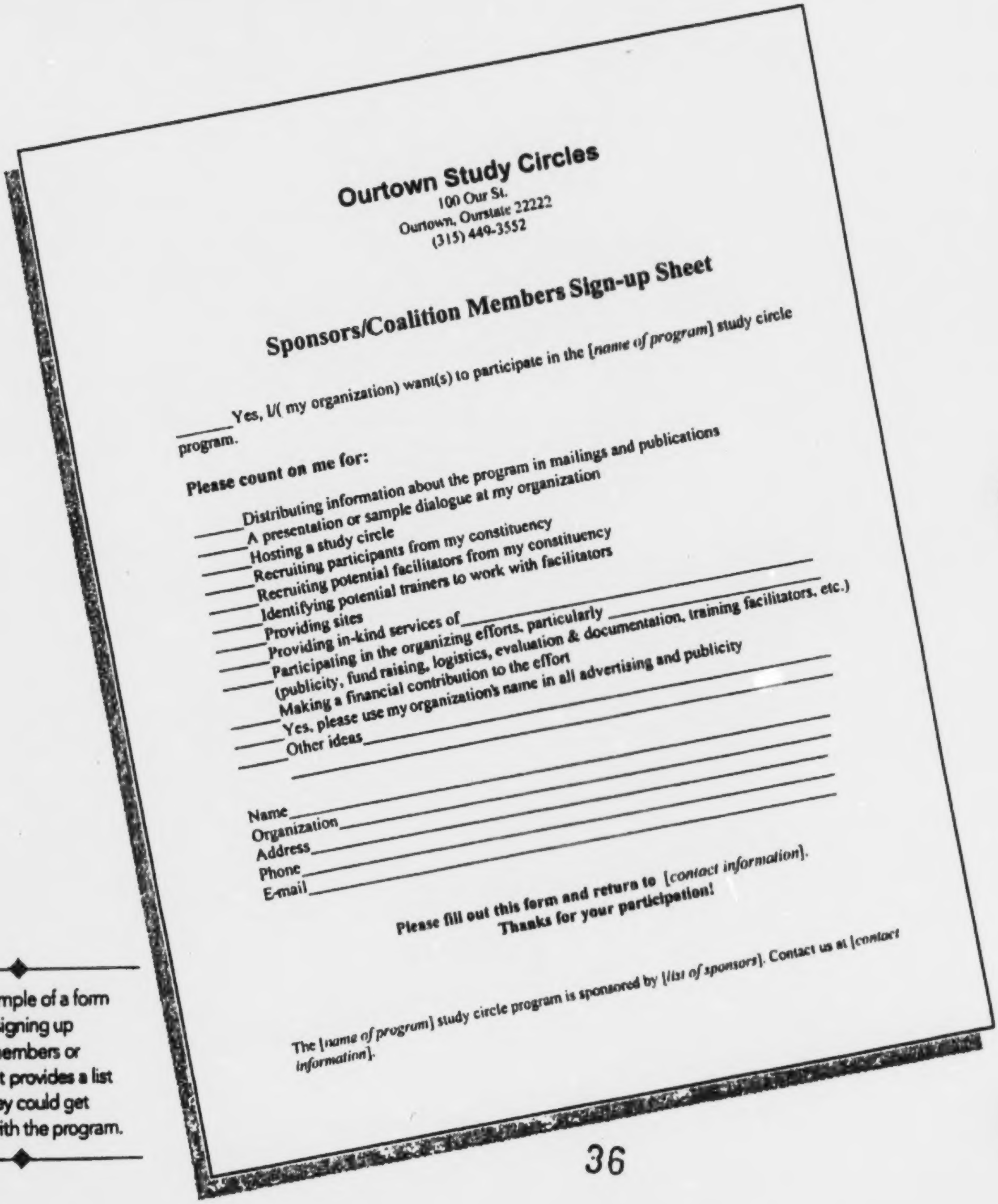
Sample Document: Sign-up Sheet for Sponsors/Coalition Members



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Sponsors/Coalition Members Sign-up Sheet

______Yes, I/(my organization) want(s) to participate in the [*name of program*] study circle program.

Please count on me for:

______Distributing information about the program in mailings and publications
______A presentation or sample dialogue at my organization
______Hosting a study circle
______Recruiting participants from my constituency
______Recruiting potential facilitators from my constituency
______Identifying potential trainers to work with facilitators
______Providing sites
______Providing in-kind services of____________________
______Participating in the organizing efforts, particularly ____________
(publicity, fund raising, logistics, evaluation & documentation, training facilitators, etc.)
______Making a financial contribution to the effort
______Yes, please use my organization's name in all advertising and publicity
______Other ideas____________________________________

Name____
Organization__________________________________
Address______________________________________
Phone_______________________________________
E-mail______________________________________

Please fill out this form and return to [*contact information*].
Thanks for your participation!

The [*name of program*] study circle program is sponsored by [*list of sponsors*]. Contact us at [*contact information*].

◆

This is a sample of a form to use for signing up coalition members or sponsors. It provides a list of ways they could get involved with the program.

◆

Step 3

Build Your Team

Identify a Coordinator and Establish Clear Areas of Responsibility

The coordinator of a community-wide study circle program is *central* to its success.

He or she helps get the planning going, and oversees all the aspects of the organizing work being carried out by coalition members. Not only does the coordinator deal with the details of organizing a study circle program, he or she frequently represents the study circle program in the larger community.

It's a good idea to find a coordinator as early as possible in your planning process. Some communities get things started with staff of working-group organizations (or volunteers) doing the early planning while searching for a coordinator.

This section will help you:

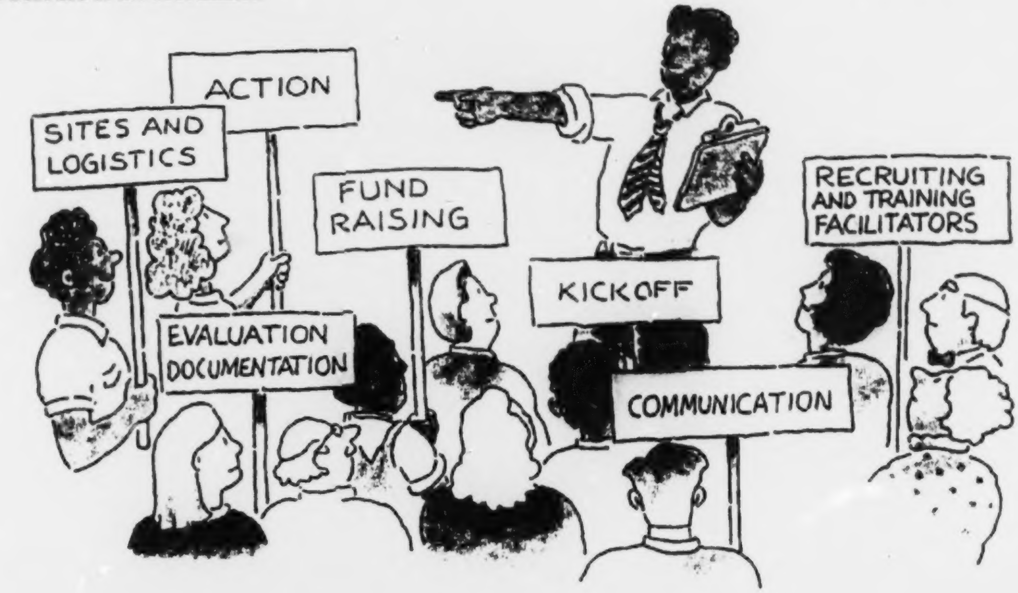
⊃ find the best coordinator for your program.

⊃ make the best use of the coordinator.

What to do

- Define the job.
- Decide how the program will be staffed.
- Once you have a coordinator, establish clear areas of responsibility.
- Support the coordinator.

A ***key role*** of the coordinator is to work with the various committees that carry out different aspects of the organizing. The ***challenge*** for the coordinator is to keep everyone involved and informed as the work progresses, and to maintain the proper balance among the players.



How to do it

What makes a good coordinator?

The person you are looking for…

- has excellent communication skills.
- interacts easily with all kinds of people – and knows how to get them to work well together.
- can manage a number of complicated tasks all at the same time.
- knows how manage details.
- is flexible and willing to work irregular hours.
- knows the community well, and has a good sense of how the community usually works.
- has strong contacts with community resources.
- is good at planning and coordinating meetings.
- possesses good presentation skills.

◆ Define the job.

The work of a coordinator generally breaks down into two broad categories.

- First, the coordinator often serves as the ambassador for the program – doing speaking engagements; convening and running meetings of the coalition; calling on leaders in the community to invite them to participate; and acting as the spokesperson for the program to the media and other community organizations.
- Second, the coordinator is often the key internal administrator of the program – keeping tabs on all aspects of the work being carried out by coalition members, and supporting them in their work; reminding people of their tasks; keeping the coalition informed of the big picture; managing correspondence, paperwork, and the database. More often than not, coordinators end up "filling in the gaps" and doing unforeseen tasks.

The coordinator's job is challenging. Keep your eyes open for support staff or volunteers who can help with administrative details.

◆ Decide how the program will be staffed.

Sometimes, one of the organizations in the working group can donate a staff member to coordinate the program. It is a real plus if this is someone who has been involved in creating the study circle program from the very beginning.

If you're going to hire a coordinator, involve coalition members in the search – and ask them to help you get the word out.

◆ Once you have a coordinator, establish clear areas of responsibility.

Consider the work that needs to be done, and then divide it among the coordinator, coalition members, volunteers, and any support staff. Discuss the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved. Pay special attention to major program areas – such as communication, recruitment, facilitator training, fund raising, evaluation, and action planning. Make it clear how much oversight and direction the coordinator will be expected to provide.

◆ Support the coordinator.

An important reminder for your working group: Shared work and shared leadership lead to a more effective program. If an excellent coordinator ends up doing too much of the work, the coalition will become more of an advisory or figurehead group, and the coordinator will get over-extended. The effectiveness of the coalition will be diminished if its members don't play an active role, and the chances of sustaining the program will decline. Work to maintain a reasonable balance of responsibilities. Use planning meetings to consider the workload that the coordinator is carrying and to see whether members of the working group can take on tasks that may be expanding as the program grows.

Staffing your program

Your staffing needs depend on the size and scope of your program. For example, 4,000 people have already taken part in study circles in New Castle County, Delaware, and the program continues to expand. The YWCA has two staff members dedicated full-time to the project; other organizations in the working group provide considerable assistance. In some programs that include hundreds of people, it is possible for one person to coordinate the work. In both cases, other organizations in the working group provide considerable assistance.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. **At what point should we find a coordinator?** Many programs run a successful pilot round of circles with a few organizations coordinating the effort, and then identify a coordinator as they begin to work toward a full round in the community.

2. **How many hours per week does it take to coordinate a study circle program?** It depends on how active the coalition is, how many circles are under way, and how effective your committees are in carrying out specific work. A program in a small town could be coordinated on a part-time basis. For larger communities with more participants, this is a full-time job.

3. **Should a coordinator be a volunteer, or should we plan to pay the coordinator a salary?** Some small communities may be able to plan a round of study circles with volunteer coordination, but having a paid coordinator is almost always a better option. In most programs, it is essential.

4. **If we can only manage a part-time position, how can we get everything done?** Some communities handle administrative support with volunteers, and call on sponsoring organizations to carry out some of the tasks.

5. **Where do most communities find the funds to pay a coordinator?** The coordinator's salary represents the largest line item in the program budget. In some cases, one of the organizations in the coalition can donate part or all of an employee's time to coordinate the study circle effort, while another member might contribute office space. If there are not sufficient funding resources among the coalition members, the organizers must develop fund-raising strategies to cover the coordinator's salary.

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Develop a Plan

Step 4

By this point, you've reached out to many diverse groups in the community, and asked them to support the study circle effort. Now it is time for the coalition members to get down to the business of real planning.

This section will explain:

⊃ how to identify program goals, scope, needs, and resources.

⊃ how to create a plan for your overall effort.

Coming together to develop a comprehensive work plan will help you lay the foundation for all your future work. Take as much time as you need. Some members of the coalition may not know each other, or may never have worked together before. The time you spend on planning will help you build lasting relationships among key organizers, and strengthen the long-term impact of your program. Revisit your plan from time to time, and expand or adapt it as your program develops.

What to do

- Talk about why it is important to engage the community in dialogue and problem solving on this issue.
- Define the goals of your program.
- Decide on geographic scope.
- Consider how you will achieve diversity in the circles.
- Decide what kind of support you will provide for action ideas.
- Talk about resources – what you have, and what you need.
- Develop a written work plan.
- Make sure there is effective communication among all those involved in the work.

Use the work sheet on page 36 to help you structure your planning meetings.

How to do it

♦ Talk about why it is important to engage the community in dialogue and problem solving on this issue.

Use these questions to guide the conversation:

- ⊃ What is the situation in the community that has brought us together?
- ⊃ Is the problem long-standing, or is there a new development?
- ⊃ What has been tried in the past to make headway on this issue? What happened?
- ⊃ Why do we think study circles (that is, community-wide dialogue for action and change) can help?

♦ Define the goals of your program.

Spelling out the goals of the program will bring the coalition members together, clarify your purpose, and provide a framework for all the organizing work to follow. Set aside some time for this important conversation.

Remember that goals should be concrete and specific. They usually fall into two categories: *impact goals* and *process goals*. (For more advice on goal setting, see "Document and Evaluate Your Program" on pages 63-81.)

Tying goals to organizing tasks

Every aspect of organizing – communication, fund raising, recruiting participants, recruiting and training facilitators, moving to action, putting together diverse circles, and evaluation – should tie directly to achieving the goals you have set.

Impact goals are the *kinds of change* you want the program to bring about. While you can't predict specific outcomes, since those will arise from the circles themselves, it is possible to describe the kinds or categories of change you are aiming for.

Ask yourselves:

- ⊃ What would it look like to have significant change on this issue?
- ⊃ What are the kinds of things we hope the study circles will accomplish?
- ⊃ What hopes do we have *in common* for this program? (Remember that stating your goals broadly will encourage all kinds of people and viewpoints to get involved. For example, a program that says it wants to "end racism, improve race relations, and begin racial healing" is likely to draw more people than a program that calls for "supporting affirmative action.")
- ⊃ What goals do we have that are both broad and specific? (For example, "end racism, improve race relations, and begin racial healing" is much more specific than a program "to help people talk about race.")

Process goals are the elements of the program that will help reach your desired impact. These goals include things such as:

- ⊃ the number of participants within a set time frame;
- ⊃ the kinds of diversity there will be among participants;
- ⊃ the number of facilitators to be trained;
- ⊃ the quality of facilitation;
- ⊃ the diversity of the facilitator pool;
- ⊃ the kinds of support for action and change that will be put in place.

♦ Decide on geographic scope.

Discuss these kinds of questions:

➲ What is the geographic area we are trying to impact? The neighborhood, the town, the city, the county? The whole school district, one school, or a set of schools?

➲ Is it necessary to divide the area into smaller sections to make the organizing easier? (For example, in large metropolitan areas, you might want to divide the area into more manageable pieces, such as neighborhoods, or quadrants of the city. In this case, the central organizing group might handle some tasks that affect the whole program, such as fund raising, media, evaluation, and facilitator training. Other tasks, such as logistics and recruitment, would be handled on the neighborhood level.)

➲ If we are dividing a large area into smaller sections, would it be more effective to have multiple kickoffs and action forums?

➲ What mix of participants are we looking for?

♦ Consider how you will achieve diversity in the circles.

Keeping the goals of your program in mind, think about the kinds of diversity you want in the circles, and how you might achieve that. Will you pair organizations, assign individuals to various groups, or reach out to different groups to bring them in? Again, this is a preliminary discussion to help coalition members think strategically about diversity. Later, the recruitment committee will explore various methods for putting the circles together. (See "Recruit Participants" on pages 83-88.)

◆ Decide what kind of support you will provide for action ideas.

Early in the process, coalition members need to talk about how they hope to support the action ideas that come from the dialogue. This is a preliminary conversation, which will be further explored and developed by the group or committee assigned to plan for action and the action forum. Organizers handle action in a variety of ways:

- ➲ The program holds an action forum to help launch action strategies, but does not provide further support to implement them.
- ➲ The program will plan to support the action that comes from a particular round of study circles.
- ➲ The program is structured to provide support for ongoing rounds of circles, and the action coming from them.

◆ Talk about resources – what you have, and what you need.

What kinds of resources will it take to organize this program (staffing, training capacity, administrative help, printing and copying, evaluation expertise, public relations experience, etc.)? Do we already have these resources among us? What else do we need, and where should we look? (See "Develop a Budget and Plan for Fundraising" on pages 55-62.) You may want to have a broad conversation and then ask a smaller committee to work through the details of the budgetary plan.

◆ Develop a written work plan.

Think about the timing of your program:

- ⊃ What is happening in the community that might affect our timing?
- ⊃ When is the best time to schedule the study circles? (For example, most programs run their circles in the fall, or winter-spring time periods. This avoids the winter holidays, and the summer, which is better spent on planning.)
- ⊃ When will we hold the kickoff?
- ⊃ When will we hold the action forum?
- ⊃ When we will hold facilitator training(s)?
- ⊃ Are we planning one round, or continuing rounds of circles? If there is more than one round, how many can we handle in a year?

To develop a written plan, list tasks and timelines, and note who is taking responsibility. Take a look at the work to be done, and decide who on the coalition will take primary responsibility for it. Remember to be clear about what the coordinator will be expected to do.

◆ Make sure there is effective communication among all those involved in the work.

Think about how to keep track of the different aspects of the organizing work. The coordinator should be in touch with everybody, and have an overall sense of how things are progressing. The working group will also be meeting regularly with the coordinator to monitor progress. Sometimes, related committees may want to meet together (for example, communication and recruitment) to ensure that their work is coordinated and complementary.

Above all, it's important to keep the communication flowing in all directions, so that all those involved understand how their work relates to the whole project.

Work Sheet: Developing a Plan

Whether you develop a plan in one meeting or several meetings, here are some suggestions about the kinds of questions you'll need to consider as you plan. Write down your goals and plans so that you can share them with other members of the coalition.

Work Session 1: What brings us together?

- What is the situation in our community that has brought us to this meeting?
- Why is this issue important?
- How would dialogue help?
- Is this topic compelling to many different kinds of people?
- How do we "name and frame" the issue so that it will interest lots of people?

Work Session 2: Setting goals for the program

- What are we trying to accomplish?
- What are the goals of the study circle program?
- Why are study circles the right process to reach the goals?
- What would success look like?
- How will we know if we have met our goals?

Work Session 3: Dividing the work

- Develop a timeline. (The dates do not have to be final, but this will provide a general framework for your program.)
- Brainstorm a list of tasks and of committees to be created, including possible leaders and members. (Consider communication, fund raising, recruitment, training facilitators, evaluation, planning for action, etc.)
- Set upcoming meeting dates, and decide how people will stay in touch with the project.

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Step 5

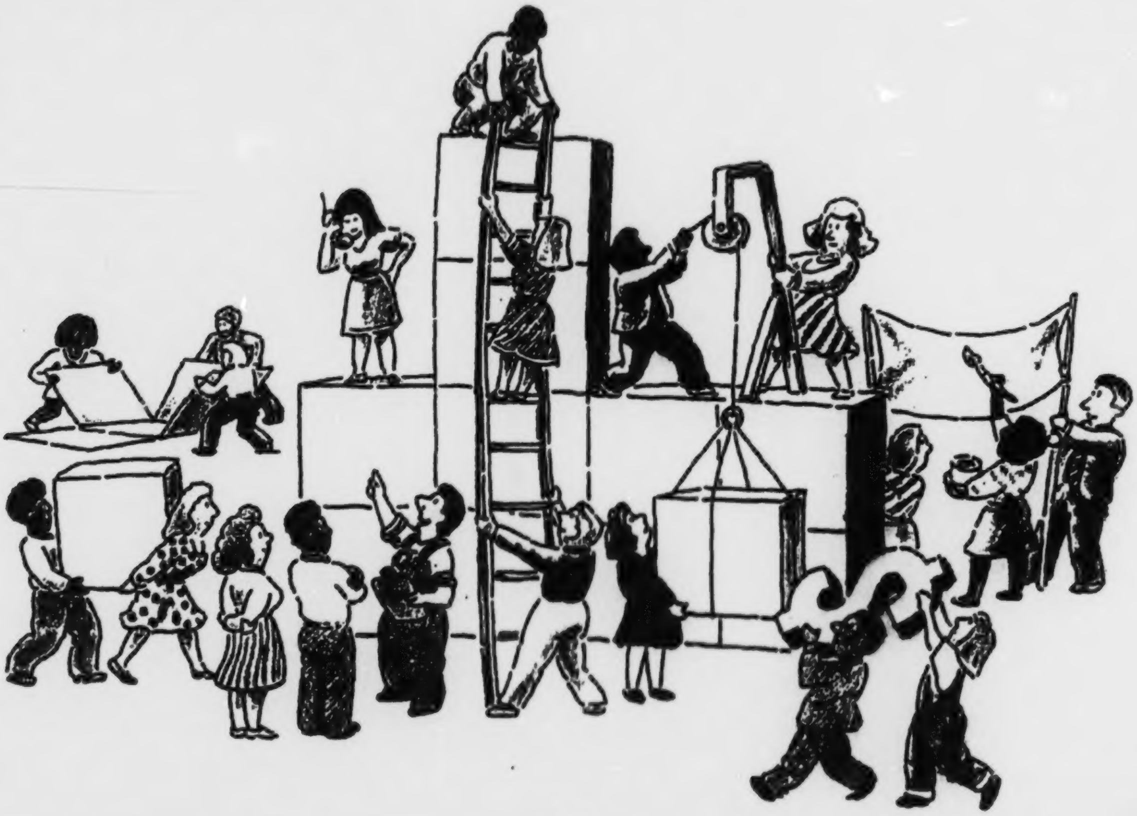
Introduction

This section offers detailed advice on many aspects of organizing, now that the foundation has been laid and your planning is well under way. You've probably spent considerable time clarifying your goals, building the core working group, recruiting organizations and individuals into the sponsoring coalition, and developing a work plan.

Other specific organizing jobs are now at hand. Some programs form committees to carry out these organizing tasks. Others work more informally with the coordinator and some dedicated volunteers.

The following sections describe these tasks:

- ⊃ Plan and Carry Out Communication
- ⊃ Develop a Budget and Plan for Fund Raising
- ⊃ Document and Evaluate Your Program
- ⊃ Recruit Participants and Form Diverse Groups
- ⊃ Plan for Action, Including the Action Forum
- ⊃ Recruit, Train, and Support Facilitators
- ⊃ Plan the Kickoff
- ⊃ Find Sites and Handle Logistics



Step 5

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Plan and Carry Out Communication

When you think about communication, media publicity most likely comes to mind. Publicity *is* important, and will be a big part of communicating about your program. But communication involves much more. It's the many ways you create awareness of your program and reach out to different groups in your community. It can involve community relations, advertising, media relations, other forms of publicity, and even fund raising.

Take some time to plan your communication before the demands of your program set in. If you can recruit media or PR sponsors for your study circle program (see "Involving the Media in Your Program" on pages 139-141 in the Appendices), they can lend their expertise to your communication planning. Look for partnerships with the major daily newspaper, a community-minded TV or radio station, a public relations firm, or the PR department of a local business, school district, college or hospital.

What to do

- Review your program and its goals.
- Identify the groups and people you're trying to reach (your audiences), and set priorities.
- Develop talking points (what you want to say).
- Plan and develop communication tools.
- Work with the mass media.
- Follow up, evaluate, and decide what to do next.

Establish a communication committee

Good communication is key to an effective program. It's a big job – you'll definitely need a committee to coordinate the work. At the same time, everyone on the coalition will be doing some aspect of communication. Make sure everyone reads this section before they plan or do their work.

How to do it

◆ Review your program and its goals.

By now, your working group has identified and researched your community problem, discussed the potential of the study circle program, and developed program goals. Review this work so that you know and understand the goals of the study circle program. Look over minutes of meetings, flip chart notes and reports. Ask members of the working group to bring you up to speed. Do your own research to fill in gaps.

◆ Identify the groups and people you're trying to reach (your audiences), and set priorities.

Once again, refer to your program goals. Brainstorm a list of the people or groups you need to reach to accomplish each goal. (See "Build Your Team" on pages 19-26 and "Recruit Participants" on pages 83-88 for tips). Look over the lists your committees developed when they were thinking about how to build the coalition and recruit participants. Do you need to expand the lists? Your list will be long, so set priorities. Spend your greatest effort reaching the people and groups who can help you spread the word to diverse groups of friends, neighbors or colleagues.

◆ Develop talking points (what you want to say).

These are the points you will use to convince people to support or participate in your program. They should be simple, logical statements that give people a good reason to join your effort.

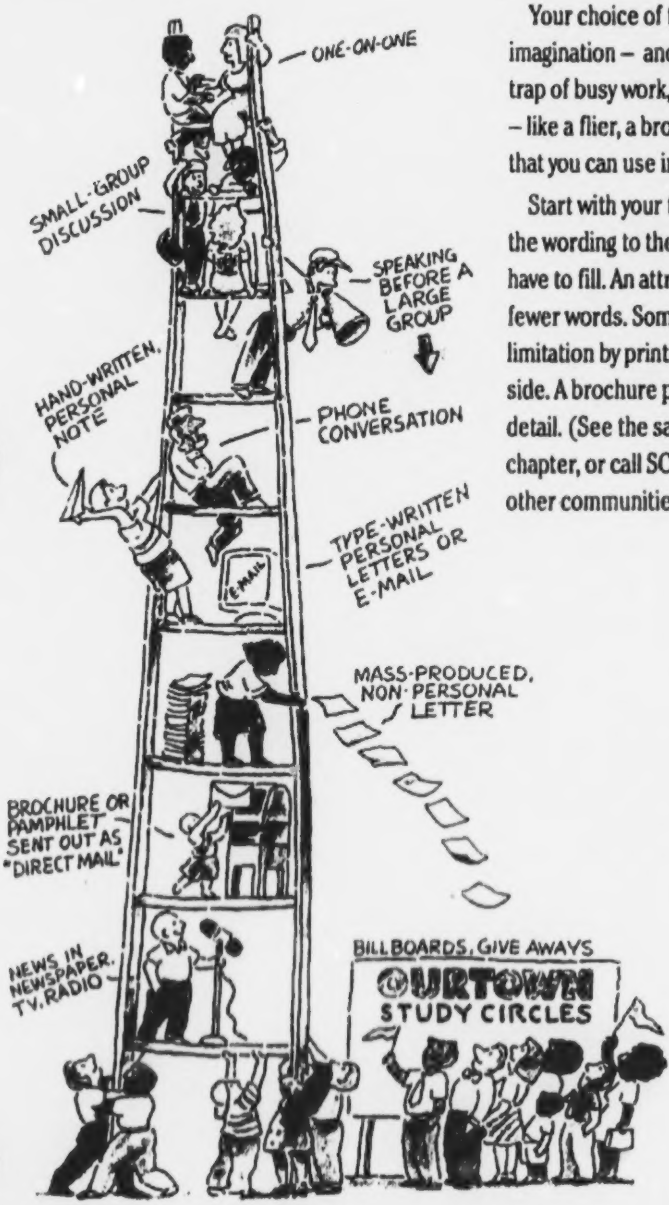
Your talking points should explain:

- ⊃ The issue your community is facing.
- ⊃ What needs to happen for change.
- ⊃ The study circle process, and why it works on this issue.
- ⊃ What study circles can accomplish in your community.

Develop points so they relate to the concerns of your *audience*. Help people see how study circles meet *their* needs or advance the mission of *their* business or organization. (See "An Overview of Community-wide Study Circles" on pages 1-5 for wording to explain the study circle process.) Once you write your basic points, adapt them for different formats, like fliers, brochures, press releases, or speeches. (See the sample flier and talking points at the end of this chapter.)

Step 5

The Ladder of Effective Communication


ONE-ON-ONE
SMALL-GROUP DISCUSSION
SPEAKING BEFORE A LARGE GROUP
HAND-WRITTEN, PERSONAL NOTE
PHONE CONVERSATION
TYPE-WRITTEN PERSONAL LETTERS OR E-MAIL
E-MAIL
MASS-PRODUCED, NON-PERSONAL LETTER
BROCHURE OR PAMPHLET SENT OUT AS "DIRECT MAIL"
NEWS IN NEWSPAPER, TV, RADIO
BILLBOARDS, GIVE AWAYS
OURTOWN STUDY CIRCLES

The higher you go on this ladder, the more effective your communication.

◆ Plan and develop communication tools.

Your choice of tools is limited only by your imagination – and your time! To avoid the trap of busy work, develop a few basic tools – like a flier, a brochure, and a pitch letter – that you can use in lots of ways.

Start with your talking points, and tailor the wording to the amount of space you have to fill. An attractive flier calls for fewer words. Some people get around that limitation by printing more detail on the flip side. A brochure provides more space for detail. (See the samples at the end of this chapter, or call SCRC for samples from other communities.)

What makes communication effective?

- The more personal, the more effective. Narrow your audience. When you can, talk to people one-on-one.
- Develop a consistent message and identity. Give your study circle program a name. Design a logo so that people will recognize your materials.
- Designate one spokesperson. That person should handle all media calls. This may be your coordinator. If not, he or she must work closely with the coordinator.
- Have coalition members help get the word out. Give them talking points. Have them practice explaining the program and its goals. Ask them to put articles and notices in their company newsletters and church bulletins.
- Get your word out in different ways (for example, in a news article, a church bulletin, and a personal phone call).
- In every message, tell people *what* you'd like them to do and *how* they can do it. Include contact information on everything you put out.

Selecting Communication Tools

To accomplish these objectives:	Use this medium:	With these tools:
♦ Motivate action ♦ Follow up general publicity ♦ Lead up to a face-to-face meeting	Personal messages	♦ Telephone calls ♦ Letters or cards ♦ Personal e-mails
♦ Target specific groups of people ♦ Build credibility by using a trusted source of information	Small-scale publications	♦ Newsletters ♦ Church bulletins ♦ Business publications ♦ Employee publications ♦ Brochures or fliers
♦ Raise general awareness ♦ Reach large numbers of people ♦ Provide credibility (the public generally sees news reports as less biased than advertising)	Mass media	♦ Newspapers ♦ TV ♦ Radio ♦ Magazines ♦ The Internet
♦ Reach large numbers of people ♦ Convey exact information (you pay for advertising, so you determine the content)	Advertising	♦ Display ads ♦ Inserts ♦ TV, radio spots
♦ Catch people's attention in creative ways ♦ Take advantage of unusual mediums	Novelties	♦ Public bulletin boards ♦ Marquees ♦ Billboards ♦ Bumper stickers ♦ T-shirts

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◆ Work with the mass media.

If you're new to media work, be assured you don't need special training or experience to promote your story effectively. You *do* need readily available information on basic methods for reaching the media. Contact SCRC for a media kit with instructions on how to get coverage of your study circle program (See Appendix C "Involving the Media in Your Program" on pages 139-141). Or, check the resource list in the Appendices for information about how-to materials and books.

Before you begin any media relations work, write out a plan to cover the course of your program. Include strategies for getting media attention (see "Targeting Media" on page 45 for ideas), a to-do list, and deadlines. A written plan is a focus, and keeps your media activities on target and on time. Share your plan with the coalition and refer to it from time to time to make sure you're on track.

Basic rules for publications

- When designing brochures, fliers, or posters, keep in mind the eye is drawn to the largest item, whether it is a photo, a graphic, a headline, or a group of words. Think hard about what you want people to look at first, and make that item the largest. It may be a catchy slogan that points to the need for your program, or the name of the event you're publicizing. It rarely would be the name of the program itself, which you can print in smaller type toward the bottom of the page.
- Proofread all your materials! Find someone with editing experience to give everything a second eye before it goes out the door. Spelling or grammar errors will erode your credibility.
- Spell people's names correctly.
- Make sure your facts are accurate. This goes for fliers, press releases or media interviews.
- Timing is critical for publicity. Newspapers, radio and TV all need plenty of lead time – from one to three weeks – to prepare public service announcements or plan news coverage. Timing counts for distributing fliers, too. Give people enough time to plan to attend your event, but not so much time they forget it's happening.

When to do media work

➲ *Announcing your study circle program*

Use the news media to spread the word about your study circle program and to recruit facilitators and participants. News releases are the most common method of informing the media of newsworthy activities and soliciting their coverage of them. Public service announcements are another way to raise awareness of your program. (See the sample documents at the end of this chapter.)

➲ *Generating news coverage of kickoffs and action forums*

Media should be invited to attend the event through a media advisory and a news release. You may also want to hold a news conference just after the event to answer any questions reporters may have about the process and results to come.

➲ *Managing media coverage of ongoing study circles*

During the time the study circles are meeting, there are a number of media activities to consider in order to create awareness about the process.

These could include:

- Inviting reporters to attend a study circle. If you do pursue this, make sure you establish some ground rules with respect to the confidentiality of the discussion participants. You do not want the free flow of ideas at study circle meetings to be inhibited by the possibility of publication of participants' comments. (Please see FAQ No. 1, on page 46 for a complete explanation.)
- Sending out news releases to keep reporters up-to-date on the scope and progress of the study circles.
- Placing coalition leaders on radio and TV talk shows.
- Placing op-ed pieces in newspapers.

➲ *Promoting coverage of program results*

You will want to promote ongoing media coverage of the results of your study circle program. This will keep the community and participants informed about the positive outcomes of the effort and encourage future use of study circles to address other pressing community issues.

Consider the following activities:

- News releases about tangible results.
- Follow-up calls to key reporters to keep them abreast of what has happened and to request stories about the results.
- Continued placement of spokespeople on radio and TV talk shows where they can talk about the results.
- Visits to editorial boards to showcase the program and its results.
- Op-ed pieces and letters to the editor.

Step 5

Targeting Media

Media type	Who to contact	Most likely to cover
Newspapers		
♦ News story	News or city editor	Study circles, special events, results
♦ Feature story	Editor of section (business, lifestyle, travel, etc.)	Study circles, people
♦ Personal column	News editor; editorial page editor (if column appears on editorial page), or columnist	Human-interest angles; people; results
♦ Editorial (staff written)	Editorial board; editorial page editor	Program goals, impact, results
♦ Op-ed (guest written)	Editorial page editor	Program analysis, first-person experience, results
♦ Letters to the editor	Editorial page editor	Personal opinion, endorsements
♦ Calendar of events	News editor; newsroom assistant	Special events, one-day events
♦ Community announcements	News editor; newsroom assistant	Events, schedules, announcements
♦ Sunday magazine	Magazine editor	In-depth profiles, human interest
♦ Advertising	Advertising department	Recruitment, events, thank-you's
Radio		
♦ Local news story	News editor, assignment editor	Events, results
♦ Feature story	News editor, assignment editor	Human interest, people, results
♦ Public service announcement	Station manager	Program announcement, goals, recruiting
♦ Local talk show	News editor, assignment editor, program host	Program goals, results
♦ Advertising/promotion	Advertising department	Special events, recruitment
Television		
♦ Local news	News editor, assignment editor	Special events, media conferences
♦ Documentary	News editor, assignment editor	Personal or program profiles, results
♦ Local talk show	Assignment editor, program host	Program goals, results
♦ Public service announcement	Station manager	Program announcement, goals, recruiting
♦ Local-access programming (cable)	Station manager	Study circles, special events
♦ "Crawling" announcements (on bottom of screen)	Station manager, receptionist	Announcements, events, recruiting

Types of media coverage

As you can see, there are lots of ways to get your story covered by the media. Before you send a press release or make a call, it's important to know how a media outlet is organized, and which editor or department to approach. Newspapers, TV and radio have clear distinctions between the business or advertising departments and the news departments. In newspapers, the editorial and news departments also are separate. Use the chart below as a guideline. When in doubt, call the media outlet for specific information.

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◆ **Follow up, evaluate, and decide what to do next.**

Keep track of your communication efforts so that you can judge whether they're helping your program meet its goals. For example, if recent news coverage did not increase sign-up for participants in study circles, you may need to try other ways to get the word out. By evaluating your efforts as you go along, you can make quick adjustments when you need to.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. **What if the newspaper wants to send a reporter to one of the study circles?**
Remember, a study circle program is about *public* life. Try your best to accommodate a reporter's request, while maintaining the confidentiality necessary for a good study circle discussion. The best rule for having reporters attend study circles is that the study circle participants should set the rules. Each circle should have the chance to say whether it agrees to have a reporter present. If its answer is yes, the group should then decide whether:

- the reporter can quote participants freely;
- the reporter can quote participants without naming the source of the quote;
- the reporter can quote participants and name the source only if he/she approaches them afterward with the exact quote, for their approval;
- the reporter cannot quote participants at all.

Reporters occasionally show up at study circles without the facilitator or organizers knowing beforehand. You may want to prepare facilitators for this possibility, and suggest that they ask the reporter to step outside while the group discusses what it wants to do. When it comes to television journalists, some groups suggest that the journalists wait until after the study circle is over to interview participants about their experience. In this way, free and open discussion is not hampered by the presence of microphones and cameras.

2. How do I get the media to take me seriously?

- Build personal relationships with reporters and editors. Think in the long term. The reporter who asks your guidance on a story today will be the reporter you can interest in a story you want told tomorrow.
- Follow through with commitments you make to the media. The media must know you are reliable and consistent, and must believe you are truthful with the information you send out. The bedrock of the media relationship is mutual trust, but also mutual advantage.
- The media want to know why it's important for *them* to come or cover your study circle activities.
- Treat the media with respect, even when you believe they have reported inaccurately, or have been unable to cover an event you thought was important.

3. Can I send news releases, stories or op-ed articles to several media at once? Since your goal is to develop and sustain long-term relationships with media, it's important you understand the protocol for giving them information. Media expect general *news releases* to be sent to a number of outlets at the same time. If a media outlet wants to customize the story, the reporter will follow up with interviews. You can talk to the reporter one-on-one, and do not have to give the same information to other reporters.

If you have an idea for *a story*, the safest bet is to give every media outlet the same opportunity to report the story. Reporters talk to each other, and will take notice if you play favorites. Keep in mind that some stories or events lend themselves to newspapers, some to TV, and some to radio - so you can expect that some media will be more interested than others. Once again, do what you can to provide additional interviews and contacts for enterprising reporters.

Op-ed articles should be submitted to one media outlet at a time. You may submit the same article to another outlet once it is declined.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

4. **What if a news story is inaccurate or misleading?** Accept up front that the media make mistakes. Although most reporters try to get their facts straight and report various sides to an issue, they have only so much time to gather information and limited time or space for their reports. In larger media outlets, an editor may cut out important parts of a story to save space, or inadvertently edit in errors. In smaller towns, reporters may be inexperienced.

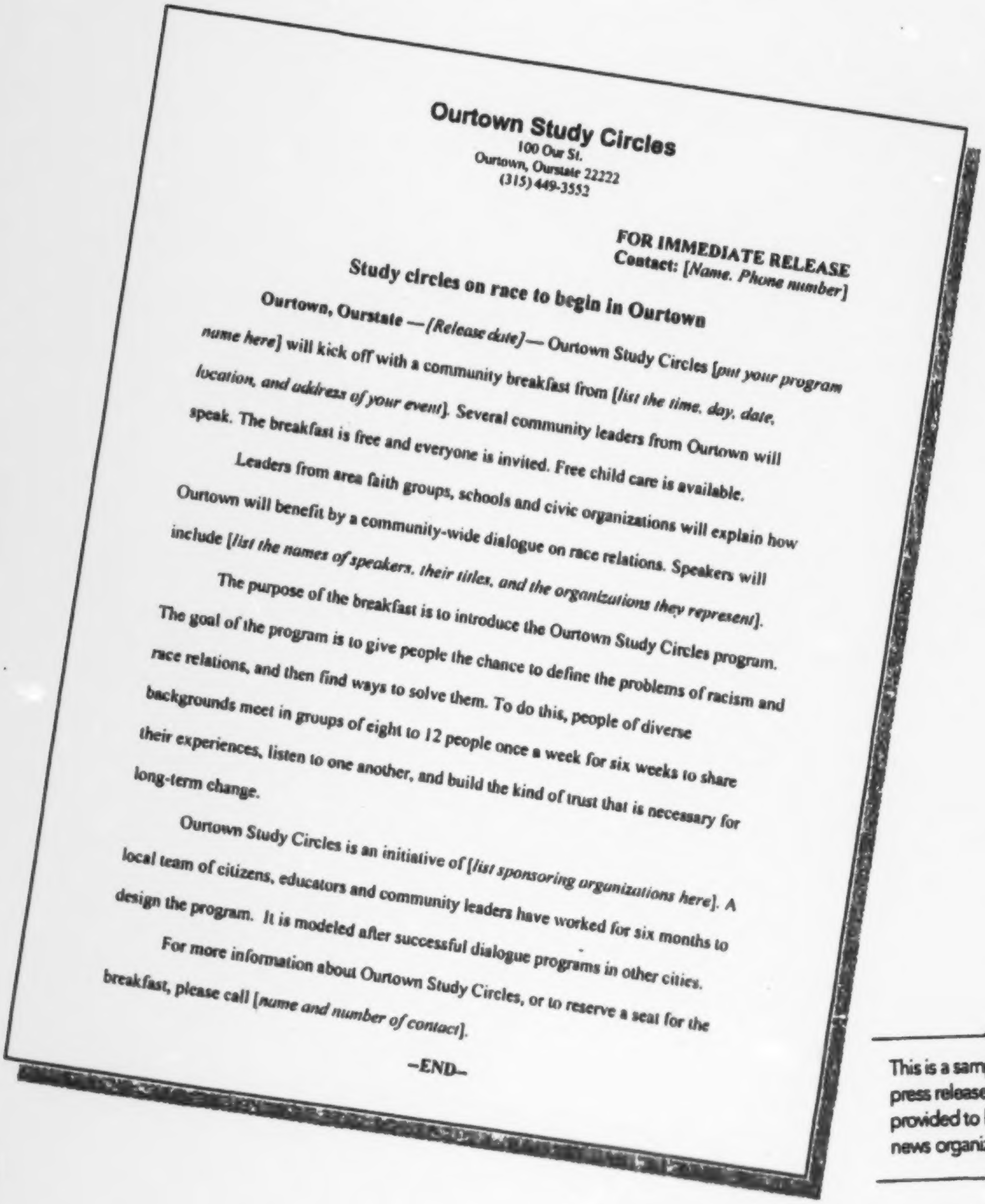
   The more complete and timely the information you can provide a reporter *before* she writes the story, the more likely you will be to head off mistakes. If a mistake does happen, or you think a story is misleading, be sure to call the reporter and correct it, politely, so that the next story doesn't repeat the error. Most media outlets publish or announce corrections. If you determine a pattern of bias, or inaccuracy, and you have talked first with the reporter, make an appointment to talk to the editor. It sometimes helps to have a small group of people from your coalition meet with the editor, reporter and publisher to explain the program and how media coverage can benefit you as well as the readers, viewers or listeners.

5. **What can I do if our program isn't getting any publicity?** Review your media plan and make sure you have identified the most appropriate media outlets. Ask yourselves these questions: Does the media outlet cover this kind of information? Are we sending our information in the format the media outlet requests, and to the right person? Are we providing information in a timely fashion? Are we suggesting interesting angles for stories that people would be interested in learning about?

   If you are doing all of the above, and are still having problems, make an appointment with reporters, editors or an editorial board to explain your program and ask how you can help the media outlet provide your information to its customers. Large media outlets may not report on your program at all, or may do only one story. Don't forget to target smaller weekly papers, neighborhood "shoppers," church bulletins, company newsletters, and other forms of media. Not only are people more likely to read the smaller publications, or listen to ethnic or specialized radio or TV stations, those media organizations are more likely to report your news.

Step 5

Sample Document: Press Release



Ourtown Study Circles

100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: *[Name. Phone number]*

Study circles on race to begin in Ourtown

Ourtown, Ourstate —*[Release date]*— Ourtown Study Circles *[put your program name here]* will kick off with a community breakfast from *[list the time, day, date, location, and address of your event]*. Several community leaders from Ourtown will speak. The breakfast is free and everyone is invited. Free child care is available.

Leaders from area faith groups, schools and civic organizations will explain how Ourtown will benefit by a community-wide dialogue on race relations. Speakers will include *[list the names of speakers, their titles, and the organizations they represent]*.

The purpose of the breakfast is to introduce the Ourtown Study Circles program. The goal of the program is to give people the chance to define the problems of racism and race relations, and then find ways to solve them. To do this, people of diverse backgrounds meet in groups of eight to 12 people once a week for six weeks to share their experiences, listen to one another, and build the kind of trust that is necessary for long-term change.

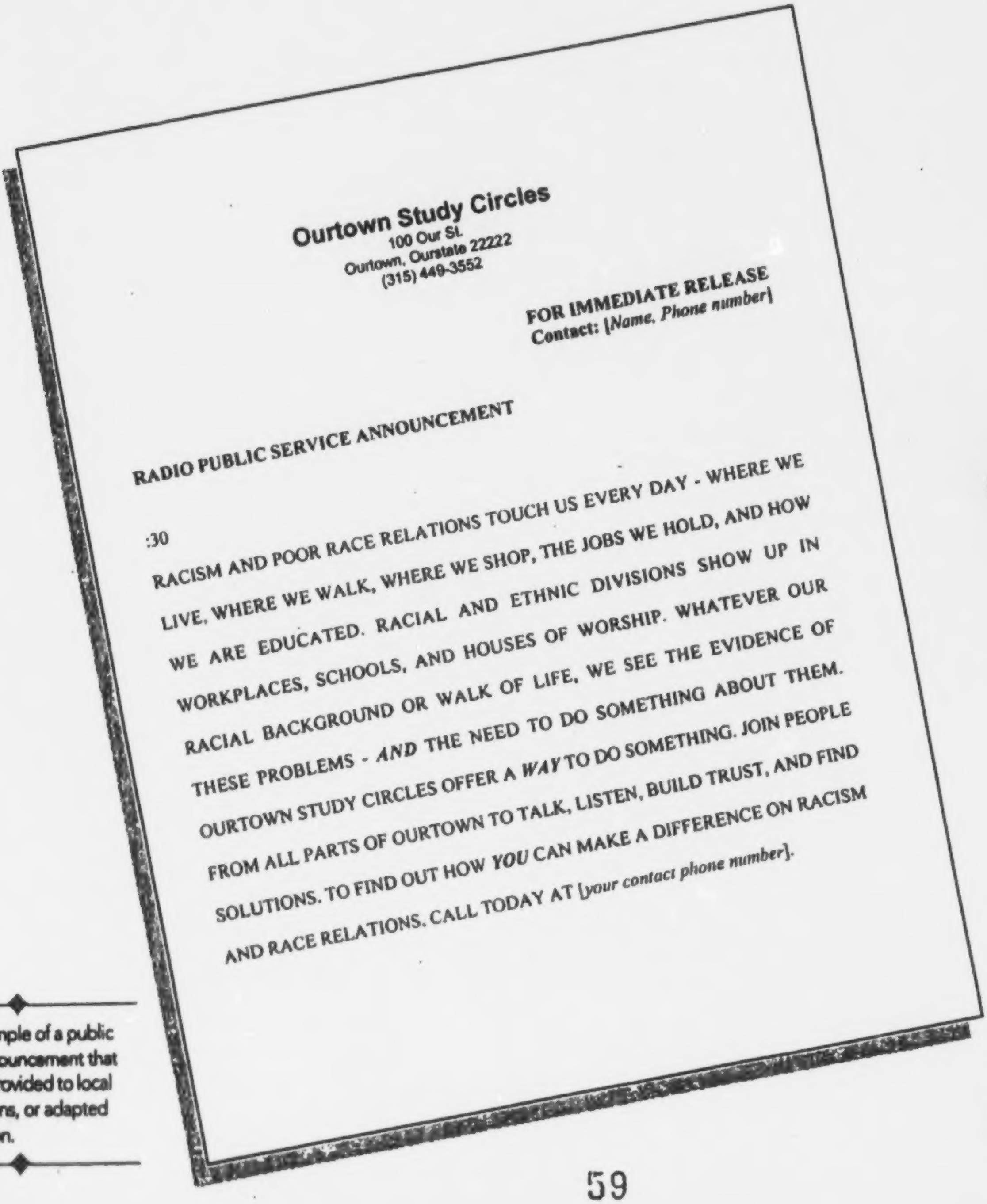
Ourtown Study Circles is an initiative of *[list sponsoring organizations here]*. A local team of citizens, educators and community leaders have worked for six months to design the program. It is modeled after successful dialogue programs in other cities.

For more information about Ourtown Study Circles, or to reserve a seat for the breakfast, please call *[name and number of contact]*.

–END–

This is a sample of a typical press release that could be provided to local community news organizations.

Sample Document: Public Service Announcement



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Contact: [*Name, Phone number*]

RADIO PUBLIC SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENT

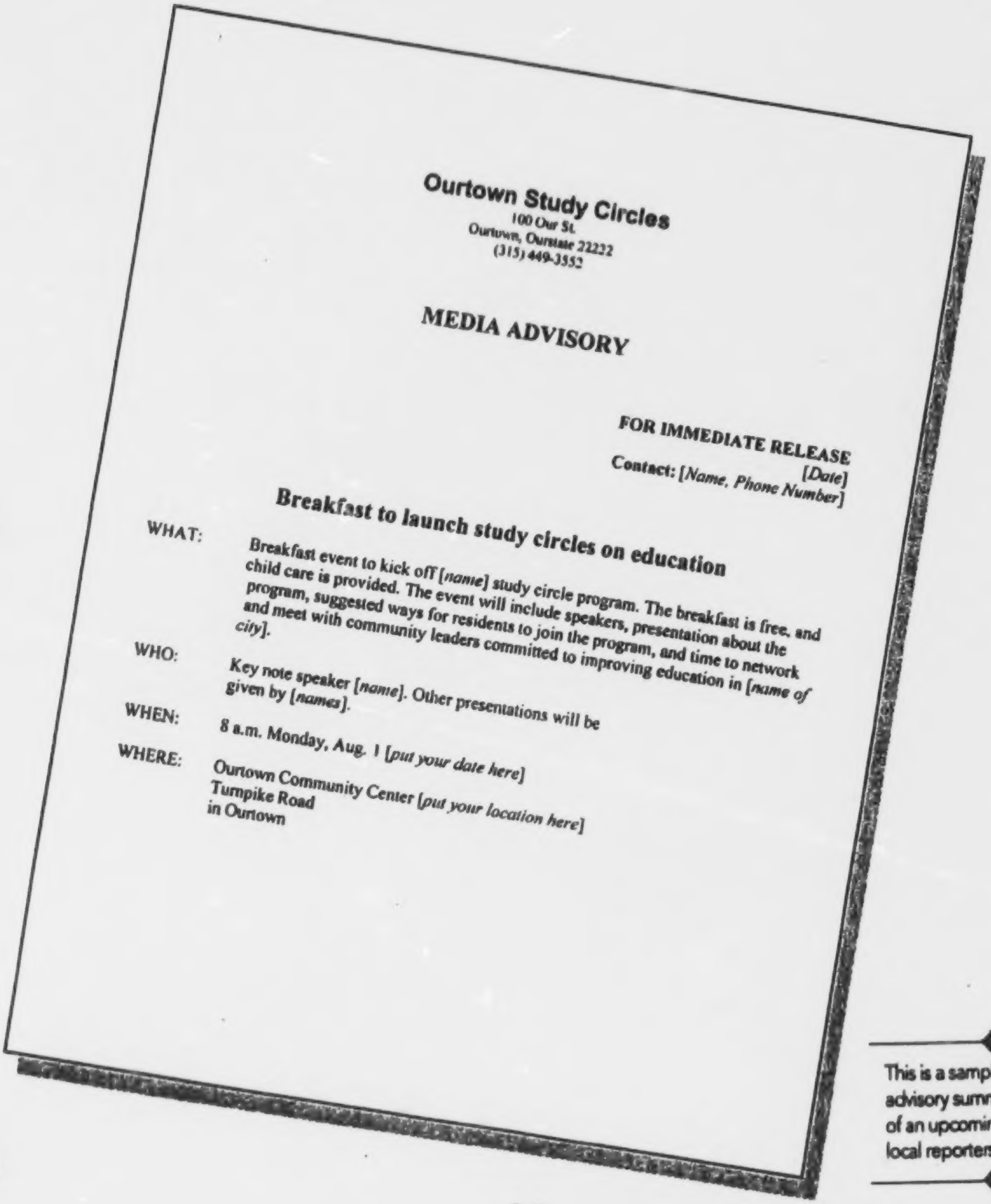
:30

RACISM AND POOR RACE RELATIONS TOUCH US EVERY DAY - WHERE WE LIVE, WHERE WE WALK, WHERE WE SHOP, THE JOBS WE HOLD, AND HOW WE ARE EDUCATED. RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIVISIONS SHOW UP IN WORKPLACES, SCHOOLS, AND HOUSES OF WORSHIP. WHATEVER OUR RACIAL BACKGROUND OR WALK OF LIFE, WE SEE THE EVIDENCE OF THESE PROBLEMS - *AND* THE NEED TO DO SOMETHING ABOUT THEM. OURTOWN STUDY CIRCLES OFFER A *WAY* TO DO SOMETHING. JOIN PEOPLE FROM ALL PARTS OF OURTOWN TO TALK, LISTEN, BUILD TRUST, AND FIND SOLUTIONS. TO FIND OUT HOW *YOU* CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE ON RACISM AND RACE RELATIONS, CALL TODAY AT [*your contact phone number*].

This is a sample of a public service announcement that could be provided to local radio stations, or adapted for television.

Step 5

Sample Document: Media Advisory



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

MEDIA ADVISORY

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
[Date]
Contact: *[Name, Phone Number]*

Breakfast to launch study circles on education

WHAT: Breakfast event to kick off *[name]* study circle program. The breakfast is free, and child care is provided. The event will include speakers, presentation about the program, suggested ways for residents to join the program, and time to network and meet with community leaders committed to improving education in *[name of city]*.

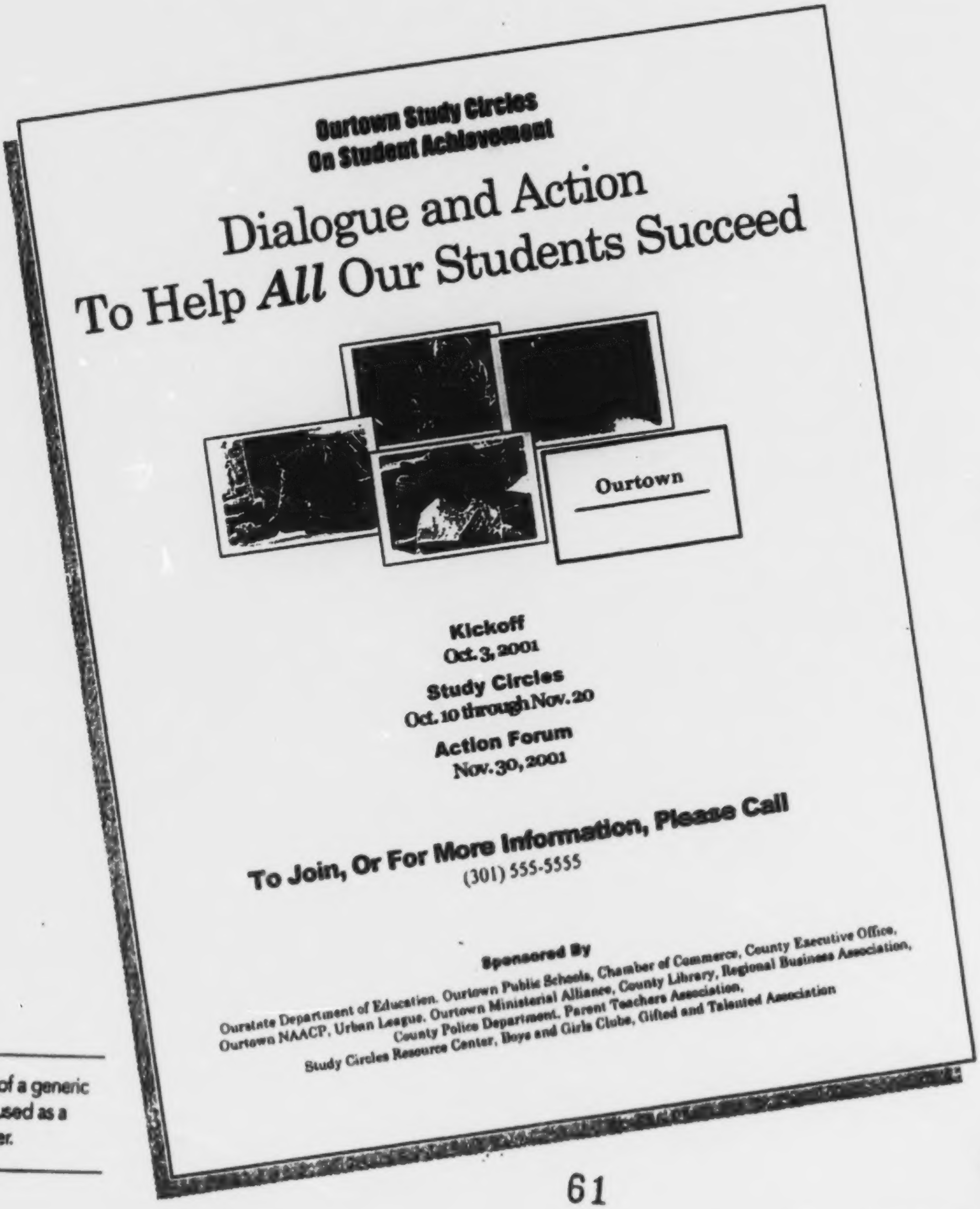
WHO: Key note speaker *[name]*. Other presentations will be given by *[names]*.

WHEN: 8 a.m. Monday, Aug. 1 *[put your date here]*

WHERE: Ourtown Community Center *[put your location here]*
Turnpike Road
in Ourtown

This is a sample of a media advisory summarizing details of an upcoming event for local reporters.

Sample Document: Flier (front)



Ourtown Study Circles
On Student Achievement

Dialogue and Action To Help *All* Our Students Succeed

Kickoff
Oct. 3, 2001

Study Circles
Oct. 10 through Nov. 20

Action Forum
Nov. 30, 2001

To Join, Or For More Information, Please Call
(301) 555-5555

Sponsored By

Ourstate Department of Education. Ourtown Public Schools, Chamber of Commerce, County Executive Office,
Ourtown NAACP, Urban League, Ourtown Ministerial Alliance, County Library, Regional Business Association,
County Police Department, Parent Teachers Association,
Study Circles Resource Center, Boys and Girls Clubs, Gifted and Talented Association

This is a sample of a generic flier that can be used as a handout or poster.

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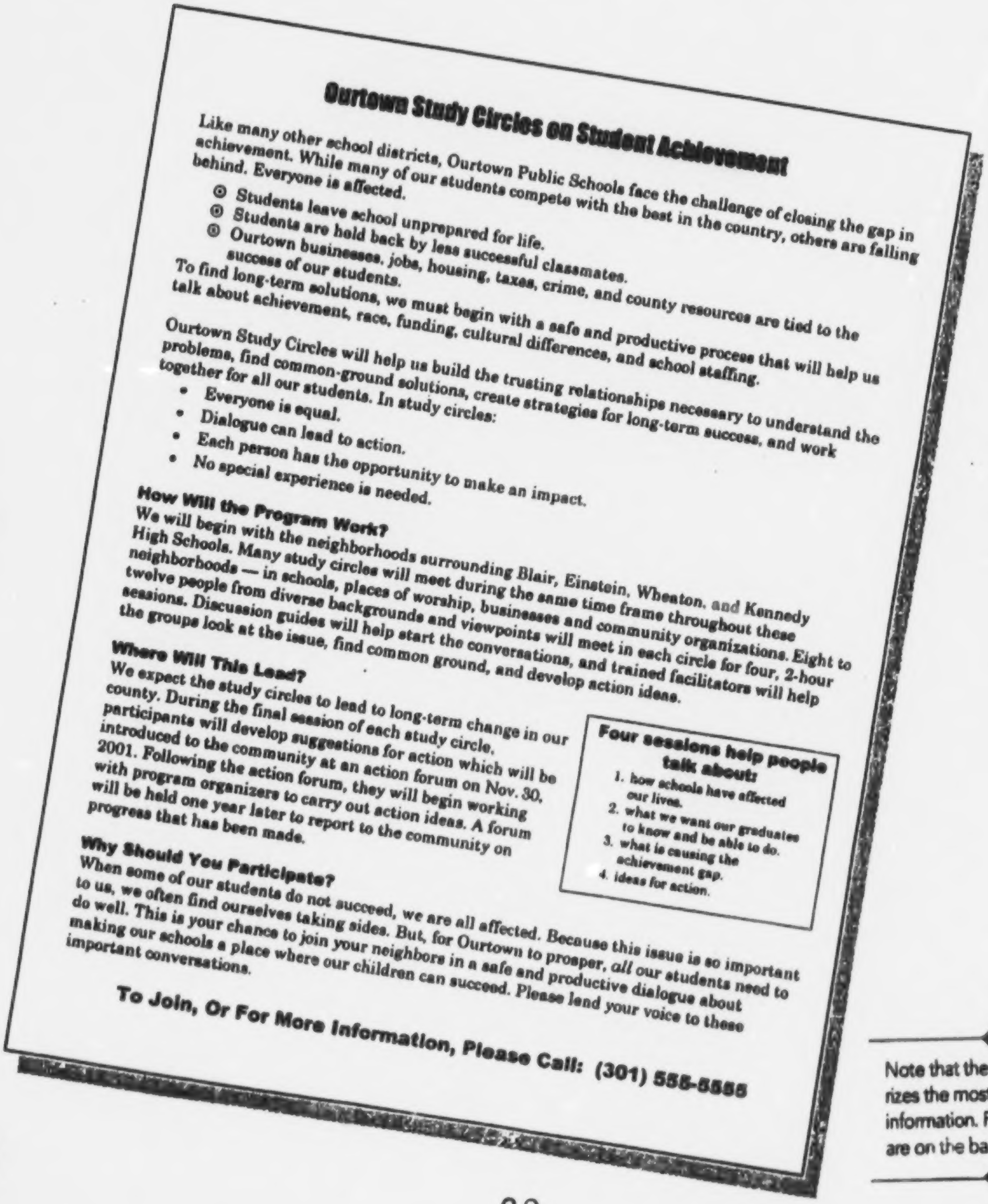
Step 5

Sample Document: Flier (back)



Ourtown Study Circles on Student Achievement

Like many other school districts, Ourtown Public Schools face the challenge of closing the gap in achievement. While many of our students compete with the best in the country, others are falling behind. Everyone is affected.

- ⊙ Students leave school unprepared for life.
- ⊙ Students are held back by less successful classmates.
- ⊙ Ourtown businesses, jobs, housing, taxes, crime, and county resources are tied to the success of our students.

To find long-term solutions, we must begin with a safe and productive process that will help us talk about achievement, race, funding, cultural differences, and school staffing.

Ourtown Study Circles will help us build the trusting relationships necessary to understand the problems, find common-ground solutions, create strategies for long-term success, and work together for all our students. In study circles:

- Everyone is equal.
- Dialogue can lead to action.
- Each person has the opportunity to make an impact.
- No special experience is needed.

How Will the Program Work?

We will begin with the neighborhoods surrounding Blair, Einstein, Wheaton, and Kennedy High Schools. Many study circles will meet during the same time frame throughout these neighborhoods — in schools, places of worship, businesses and community organizations. Eight to twelve people from diverse backgrounds and viewpoints will meet in each circle for four, 2-hour sessions. Discussion guides will help start the conversations, and trained facilitators will help the groups look at the issue, find common ground, and develop action ideas.

Where Will This Lead?

We expect the study circles to lead to long-term change in our county. During the final session of each study circle, participants will develop suggestions for action which will be introduced to the community at an action forum on Nov. 30, 2001. Following the action forum, they will begin working with program organizers to carry out action ideas. A forum will be held one year later to report to the community on progress that has been made.

Four sessions help people talk about:

1. how schools have affected our lives.
2. what we want our graduates to know and be able to do.
3. what is causing the achievement gap.
4. ideas for action.

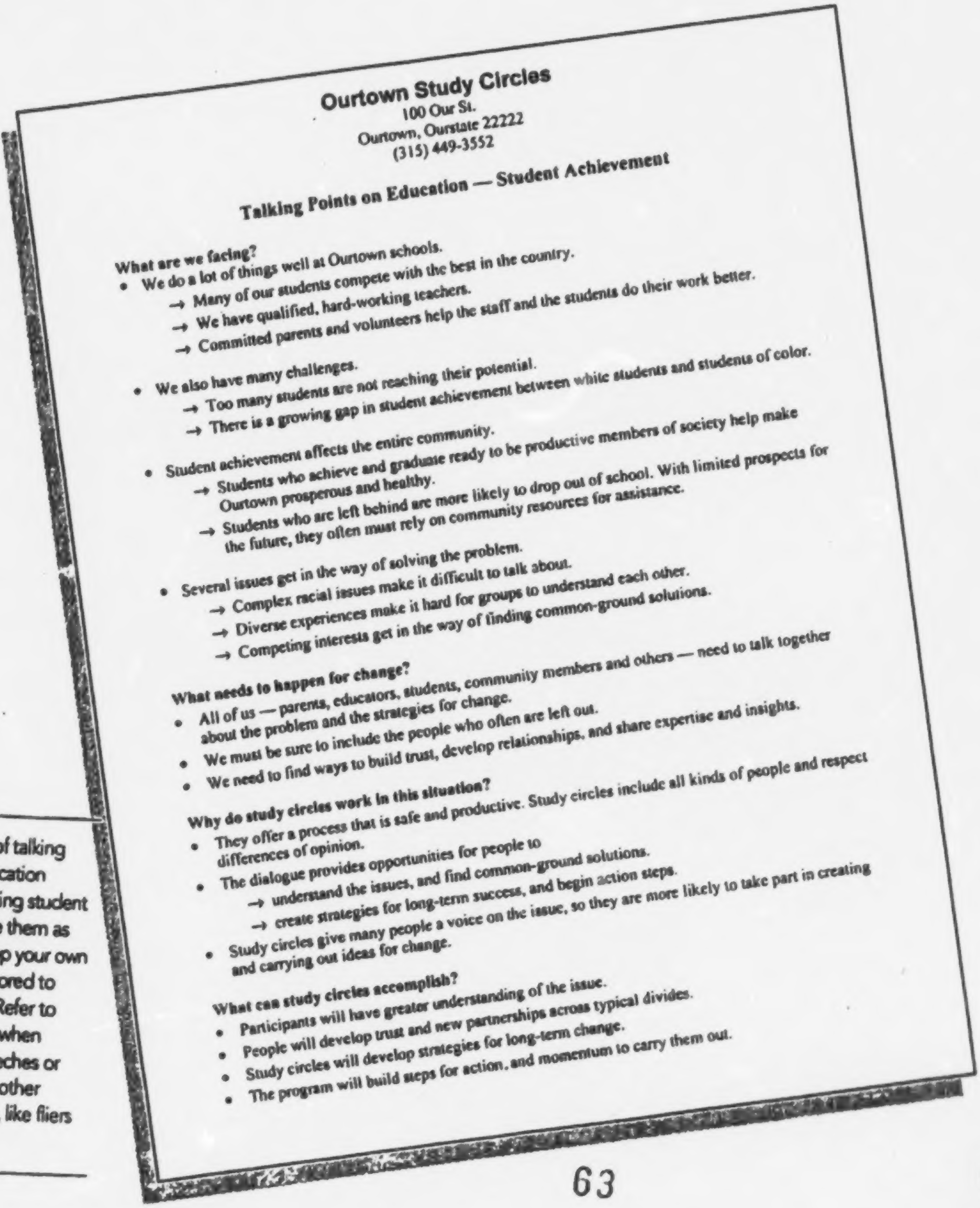
Why Should You Participate?

When some of our students do not succeed, we are all affected. Because this issue is so important to us, we often find ourselves taking sides. But, for Ourtown to prosper, *all* our students need to do well. This is your chance to join your neighbors in a safe and productive dialogue about making our schools a place where our children can succeed. Please lend your voice to these important conversations.

To Join, Or For More Information, Please Call: (301) 555-5555

Note that the front summarizes the most important information. Program details are on the back.

Sample Document: Talking Points



Ourtown Study Circles

100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Talking Points on Education — Student Achievement

What are we facing?

- We do a lot of things well at Ourtown schools.
  - → Many of our students compete with the best in the country.
  - → We have qualified, hard-working teachers.
  - → Committed parents and volunteers help the staff and the students do their work better.
- We also have many challenges.
  - → Too many students are not reaching their potential.
  - → There is a growing gap in student achievement between white students and students of color.
- Student achievement affects the entire community.
  - → Students who achieve and graduate ready to be productive members of society help make Ourtown prosperous and healthy.
  - → Students who are left behind are more likely to drop out of school. With limited prospects for the future, they often must rely on community resources for assistance.
- Several issues get in the way of solving the problem.
  - → Complex racial issues make it difficult to talk about.
  - → Diverse experiences make it hard for groups to understand each other.
  - → Competing interests get in the way of finding common-ground solutions.

What needs to happen for change?

- All of us — parents, educators, students, community members and others — need to talk together about the problem and the strategies for change.
- We must be sure to include the people who often are left out.
- We need to find ways to build trust, develop relationships, and share expertise and insights.

Why do study circles work in this situation?

- They offer a process that is safe and productive. Study circles include all kinds of people and respect differences of opinion.
- The dialogue provides opportunities for people to
  - → understand the issues, and find common-ground solutions.
  - → create strategies for long-term success, and begin action steps.
- Study circles give many people a voice on the issue, so they are more likely to take part in creating and carrying out ideas for change.

What can study circles accomplish?

- Participants will have greater understanding of the issue.
- People will develop trust and new partnerships across typical divides.
- Study circles will develop strategies for long-term change.
- The program will build steps for action, and momentum to carry them out.

This is a sample of talking points on an education program addressing student achievement. Use them as a guide to develop your own talking points, tailored to your community. Refer to the talking points when preparing for speeches or when developing other publicity materials, like fliers or press releases.

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Develop a Budget and Plan for Fund Raising

Step 5

Even though many study circle efforts rely on volunteers and in-kind assistance to get started, it is essential to think about budgeting and fund raising from the beginning. To determine what needs to happen first, think in terms of short-term needs and long-term goals. Take into account the program goals and timelines, and assess the capacities and resources available in the coalition.

Raising funds, like communication, is related to every aspect of your program. As you expand your outreach, involve more and more people in study circles, and tell the story of the impact on your community, your ability to raise funds will increase.

What to do

- Refer to the goals of your program, and develop a budget based on those goals.
- Determine how much in-kind support you have.
- Decide which fund-raising strategies you will pursue, and design a plan.
- Involve many people in pursuing a variety of funding sources.

Appoint a fund-raising "manager"

It is essential to involve coalition members in developing a fund-raising plan and in carrying it out. Choose someone to take responsibility for managing the fund-raising process (that person could be the coordinator, another staff person, or a key member of the working group). That person should keep track of timelines and goals, enlist others' help, and remind people of their tasks. Good leadership and a well-designed fund-raising plan will keep the process moving.

Developing a strong, effective program with clear goals and documented results is the most effective "fund-raising strategy."

How to do it

Track in-kind assistance

Be sure to keep track of in-kind assistance and assess its monetary value. This information can help you to leverage support from funding sources.

◆ Refer to the goals of your program, and develop a budget based on those goals.

Revisit the goals of your program, and think about their budgetary implications: How many participants are we hoping to involve? How many rounds of study circles are we planning? What will it take in the form of staffing, expertise and material resources to make that happen? Will we hire a coordinator? What kinds of support will we provide for the action stage of the program, and what kinds of staffing or other resources will it take to provide that support? What other kinds of expenses can we anticipate?

The size of the budget is directly related to the scope of your effort. Frequently the largest line item in the budget is staff salaries (for the coordinator and any support staff). (See "Possible Budget Items" on page 61 to plan the details of your budget.)

◆ Determine how much in-kind support you have.

In-kind support (that is, donations other than direct monetary support) can be crucial in the early stages of a program, when raising funds can be more difficult. It also helps establish a track record of community support for your program that can be critical to future fund raising. Ongoing, in-kind assistance is frequently the backbone of a strong, effective program.

Examples of invaluable in-kind support from coalition members include:

- Office space
- Staff time
- The training function, in whole or in part
- Printing and photocopying
- Graphic design for posters and fliers
- Photography
- Food for study circle gatherings
- Child care
- Transportation
- Radio or television airtime; newspaper space for public service announcements

◆ Decide which fund-raising strategies you will pursue, and design a plan.

First, determine how much money you need to raise in order to meet your program's goals. Look at your budget and the available in-kind support. What is your deadline for raising the funds?

Given your target amount and target date, start planning specific *tasks* and *timelines*. Do this in collaboration with the coalition members who will be involved in fund raising. Enlist them in brainstorming ideas for the plan and in helping to carry it out. Ask people to commit to specific tasks.

Many fund-raising plans include the following tasks, along with target dates and staff or volunteer assignments for each task:

⊃ *Compile a list of possible funding sources.*

Ask coalition members for ideas; each person will have a knowledge of different funding sources. Check the local library or university for a directory of philanthropic organizations in your community and region. Some communities have nonprofit resource centers with local directories. State agencies that handle local affairs also provide directories of state and local funders.

⊃ ***Investigate the sources on your list, and determine which ones are worth approaching.***

What kinds of projects do they support? What is their average grant size? Have they given to projects that are similar to study circles – such as other community building projects or citizen involvement projects? Have they given to projects that deal with the same issue your study circles will address? What are their funding guidelines? Do their grant-making schedules meet your timelines? (Some may have websites you can visit; you may need to call others to obtain information about their grant making.) Does anyone on your coalition have a connection to the source?

Sources to consider

- Foundations (especially local community foundations and local private foundations)
- Local corporations with a history of civic involvement
- United Way
- Government agencies
- Nonprofit agencies
- Individual donors
- Banks

◆

Coordinate communication

For more on talking points, see page 40. Meet with people who are concentrating on communication, so that your overall message is consistent.

◆

⊃ ***Develop talking points that will form the basis of your fund-raising message.***

Be prepared to talk about why the issue is important to the community and how the study circle program will help make a difference. This is much like talking with a potential coalition member; the only difference is that the kind of support you are seeking in this case is primarily monetary.

In order for funders to make a sound decision about whether to fund a program, they need to know about *outcomes* – that is, what the program will achieve. Be prepared to communicate about this aspect of your program.

It can be challenging to talk about the outcomes of study circle programs, partly because you can't describe in advance the *specific* action and change efforts that will come from your study circles. Yet, you should be able to describe the kinds of impact you expect the study circles to make, and the kinds of community organizations that are committed to the program.

Also, remember to point to other study circle programs around the country that have addressed the same issue, and cite the kinds of outcomes that have come from them. Finally, be prepared to describe how you will document and assess what the program has accomplished. (See "Document and Evaluate Your Program" on pages 63-81.)

⊃ ***Set up meetings with possible donors.***

If someone on your coalition has a relationship with a potential funder, that member should request a meeting. Or, perhaps there is someone on the coalition who could make an introductory call about you and your program.

The most effective fund raising is done on a one-to-one basis with individuals you already know. Whenever you talk with potential donors in your own community, remember to invite them to participate in a study circle themselves. When you meet, ask funders about their programming priorities, and how the study circles might fit.

Develop written proposals to meet funder guidelines.

Decide who will be involved in developing the proposal; even if several people are involved in brainstorming, limit the number of people who work on the final product. If you decide to hire an outside grant writer, make sure that person is involved in enough discussions to know the most important things about your program goals and plans.

If you will be developing several written proposals, you will need to create a system for keeping track of due dates and of what each funder requires.

Stay in touch with the funders from whom you have received support.

As soon as you receive notice that you will be awarded a grant, send a letter of thanks. Then create a timeline for sending reports to the funder, and for communicating stories about what kinds of difference their funds are making. This is not only common courtesy, but will help keep your program fresh in their minds.

Some basic proposal documents

It's a good idea to develop a set of basic documents that are necessary for almost any funding proposal:

- a brief description of your organization
- a list of board members with affiliation
- a list of coalition members with letters of support
- your 501(c)(3) letter
- your organizational budget
- your current financial statement
- important newspaper clippings
- stories about impact

Asking for money

It may feel awkward, but remember that funders are looking for ways to contribute to the community and make a lasting impact. If your program fits with their funding priorities, you are providing them with that opportunity.

Fund-raising events – a promising practice from the field

Some study circle programs hold large fund-raising dinners or community-wide events in civic centers or other large community spaces. They bring high-profile speakers or performers who are identified with the issue the study circle program is addressing, and charge an admission fee. This not only generates income; it provides another way to reach out to the larger community to invite their participation in the study circles.

⊃ *Decide whether and how you will use fund-raising events.*

These can be effective, but they are labor-intensive. If you decide to use events as one of your strategies, consider holding an annual fund raising event. That way, the energy and resources that go into *designing* the event for the first go-round can be put to good use in holding repeat events. Though subsequent efforts will still require lots of work, the planning can become more routinized; if planned well, such events can provide a predictable source of income each year.

⊃ *Finally, write down your fund-raising plan, and share it with everyone who is playing a role.*

A written plan makes it easier to track your progress, and to remind people of tasks they agreed to take on.

◆ **Involve many people in pursuing a variety of funding sources.**

Tap into the expertise and contacts of coalition members. Enlist all kinds of help along the way. Hold brainstorming meetings, not just to create your initial fund-raising plan, but to assess your progress. Share new ideas, connections, and strategies that will arise as you make new contacts.

Make sure you don't put all your hopes into one funding source. Foundation grants (even ones that seem like a sure bet) can be unpredictable, since foundations receive many more proposals than they can fund. The greater the variety of sources you approach, the better your odds at receiving the funding you need.

Step 5

Possible Budget Items

Staff

- Program coordinator
- Facilitator trainers
- Support staff
- Volunteers (listed as in-kind)
- Evaluator(s)

Promotion

- Mailings
- Stationery
- Printing/photocopying
- Postage
- Posters/fliers
- Newspaper advertising
- PSA's

Kickoff and other events

- Food/refreshments
- Room rental
- Audio/visual equipment
- Decorations
- Honoraria for speakers
- Entertainment

Office Expenses

- Telephone/fax/Internet
- Postage
- Photocopying

Facilitators

- Training
- Sites
- Food
- Travel or lodging for trainer
- Mileage coverage
- Volunteer hours (usually in-kind; some communities pay a small stipend)
- Child care

Study Circles

- Discussion materials*
- Translators
- Child care
- Transportation to study circles
- Recording materials (tablets, flipcharts, etc.)

*SCRC can provide some free copies of our discussion guides to help with the start-up of community-wide programs. After that, there is a nominal fee for additional copies. Many of our guides also are available on our website at www.studycircles.org.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. ***How much does a community-wide study circle program cost?*** In lots of communities, many of the program expenses are covered by in-kind donations. For example, sites are often provided free of charge, and sometimes a local community college or mediation center takes responsibility for training facilitators.

   The largest single expense is usually the coordinator's salary, although in some communities, one organization assigns all or part of an employee's time to fill that post. A medium-sized or large community will likely need a full-time coordinator; smaller programs can do with less.

2. **Where can we find funding for our program?** Most of your funding will likely come from local sources. Think about all kinds of local support, including community foundations, corporations, the Chamber of Commerce, the United Way, and local government. Some programs get support from individual donors. Make sure to invite potential local funders into your coalition from the outset.

3. **Does SCRC provide funding?** Topsfield Foundation, the parent organization of the Study Circles Resource Center, is an operating foundation, *not* a grant maker. SCRC can help, however, by writing letters of support to accompany fund-raising proposals. When you apply for funding, be sure to note any in-kind donations you receive, including the technical assistance and training that SCRC staff provides, which constitutes an in-kind grant of time and services.

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Document and Evaluate Your Program

Step 5

One of the most effective things you can do to strengthen your study circle program is to create an accurate process for documenting and evaluating the entire effort. This doesn't have to be a complicated undertaking. It's up to you to decide how detailed you want the process to be.

Most everyone who takes part in your program will want to know who participated in the study circles, how effective the organizing strategies were, and what the outcomes were. Moreover, grant-making foundations, public officials, news media, and other people who can help you expand, strengthen, and institutionalize study circles in your community will all want to know about your efforts and their impact.

What to do

- Revisit the goals set by your coalition, and identify benchmarks that will tell you whether you are meeting your goals.
- Identify the types of documentation and evaluation that will be most useful to your program.
- Identify the right tools for the job.
- Recruit outside help (if you need it!).
- Reflect on the information you have collected.
- Communicate your findings.

Establish an evaluation committee

Sign up people on the coalition who have expertise in evaluation. You need people to collect and organize information, to interpret data, and to communicate your findings. Look for people with research, analytic and writing skills and people who are comfortable working with numbers and who understand the basics of statistical analysis.

Evaluation – a collaborative learning process

The MetroHartford study circle program named program evaluation as one of its four major areas of work. The working group decided to design "an evaluation process of the model where we – facilitators, participants, and partners – collaborate to review and renew the model so that it fully supports all of us".

How to do it

◆ **Revisit the goals set by your coalition, and identify benchmarks that will tell you whether you are meeting your goals.**

Refer back to the goals you identified when you developed your initial work plan. (See "Develop a Plan" on pages 31-36.) Think about your impact goals and your process goals. Recall that impact goals describe the intended effects of the study circles upon individuals, communities, and institutions. Process goals describe the strategies that organizers use to try and meet the impact goals.

Next, think about what you want to measure, and how you would know whether you have reached your goals. Here are a few examples of goals and some indicators of whether they are being met:

Impact goals

- ➲ If one of your impact goals is for participants to develop a better understanding of each other and build trust in one another, then you can ask questions about this on a participant survey.
- ➲ If one of your impact goals is to promote new community projects or policy changes, then you can devise a system for tracking the work of action task forces that emerge from the study circles.

Process goals

- ➲ If one of your process goals is to have a diverse mix of participants in each study circle, as well as in the entire community-wide program, then you can measure the diversity in the group with a participant survey.
- ➲ If one of your process goals is to ensure quality facilitation of the study circles, you can do several things:

  Get feedback from the facilitators – Convene an informal, focused conversation with small groups of facilitators to let them share their experiences, and listen and learn from each other. This will also give you a chance to monitor their progress, hear more about their needs, and identify any problem areas.

  Use performance evaluations – Ask facilitators and participants to fill out performance appraisals at the end of a round of study circles. (Samples of evaluation forms are available in the evaluation section of SCRC's *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*.)

Note that the purpose of these measures is not to say, "Gotcha - you didn't do a very good job," but instead to help you build on your areas of strength and to improve the quality and impact of the study circles.

Note also that the best strategies for documentation and evaluation are often those that are simple, clear, and straightforward. There is a place for more complex approaches to evaluation, but you can accomplish a great deal by making sure you are focusing on the questions that are most relevant to the short – and long-term success of your program.

Using evaluation to strengthen facilitator skills

Evaluation is a key part of training and supporting facilitators. See Chapter 5 of the SCRC publication ***A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*** for in-depth advice and resources on how to use evaluation to…

- ➲ learn what is and isn't working well.
- ➲ monitor how the facilitators are doing and respond to their needs.
- ➲ come up with new strategies to improve your program.
- ➲ explore the impact of the study circle process on the facilitators.

- **Identify the types of documentation and evaluation that will be most useful to your program.**

Here are four types of documentation and evaluation that can be of great use to your program:

1. Document the basics

Keep track of things, such as the number of participants and their demographic profile (age, gender, income, race/ethnicity, education level) and ideological preference (self-identification as a conservative, moderate, or liberal). You might also want to note which neighborhoods participants come from.

2. Track the outcomes

The outcomes of study circle programs are many and varied. Here are a few examples of the types of impacts documented by other programs:

New understanding of an issue –
In Wilmington, Delaware, 79 percent of participants reported that study circles on racism and race relations had increased their understanding of others' beliefs and attitudes.

New relationships between individuals, groups, and organizations –
High school students who participated in study circles in Kuna, Idaho, arranged to hold a "senior prom" at the town's senior center. Teen-agers and seniors dressed up in formal attire and danced the night away.

New collaborations –
A hospital in Marshall, Minnesota, created a program to teach recent Somali immigrants to sew, and provided them with new employment opportunities.

Policy changes –
The city government in Springfield, Illinois, changed its hiring practices for the police department, resulting in the first African-American, the first Hispanic, and the first female to be hired in the last ten years, all in one police class.

Structural changes (new organizations and institutional arrangements leading to other changes) – In Orford, New Hampshire, study circle participants concerned with declining school enrollment proposed a regional solution. The resulting Rivendell School District is the first two-state, K-12 district in the country, spanning four small towns in New Hampshire and Vermont.

How to organize your study circle notes

Organizing your notes in the following categories can make it much easier to create a summary report at the conclusion of your study circles.

- Areas of agreement
- Areas of disagreement
- Areas where participants feel ambivalent or unsure
- Unanswered questions or areas where participants feel they need more information
- Action ideas and suggestions for changes in public policy
- Community resources or assets

3. Communicate the "public voice"

Community-wide study circle programs generate a great deal of information about participants' hopes, concerns, and ideas for change. Brief, accessible reports with this type of substantive information will be of great interest to public officials, the news media, foundations, researchers, and others who can help you expand, strengthen, and institutionalize study circles in your community. Such reports are usually based on notes recorded in all of the study circles.

4. Evaluate program implementation

Take a close look at how program implementation is shaping up. How do both the facilitators and participants feel about the quality of facilitation, the discussion guide, and logistics (that is, accessibility of meeting places, transportation, child care, etc.)? How about your coordinator, working group, and coalition – how do they feel about the way they have been working together?

Organizers use evaluations to measure progress, and adjust strategies and practices over the life of the program.

♦ Identify the right tools for the job.

Once you know what you want to measure, the next step is identifying the most appropriate tools for the task. Here are the types of tools you are most likely to use:

Taking notes

Keep careful records of the organizing process: Take notes on all the work you do – from meetings with your working groups, to discussions with potential sponsors, to briefings with members of the news media.

Keep records from all the study circles: It is especially important to keep a brief session-by-session record of the discussion within each study circle. Notes from all the study circles can be combined into a report for the program as a whole; they will be useful in planning action forums; and they can be used to give updates to public officials and journalists. (See "Plan for Action" on pages 89-98 and "Recruit, Train, and Support Facilitators" on pages 99-106 for information on training recorders.)

Two facilitators, working as a team, can easily take turns leading the discussion and taking notes. (Participants can also be asked to volunteer, but make sure it's not the same person for every session, because taking notes takes the person out of the discussion.) Keep track of the most important points, particularly the action ideas and main areas of agreement or disagreement. This record doesn't have to be scientific or complex, but it does have to be fair and objective. At the end of the session, make sure everyone agrees the summary captures what happened in the session.

Surveys, questionnaires, and databases

Surveys and questionnaires are essential tools for keeping track of basic information such as the participants' demographic profile. They can also help you gauge participants' opinions about the quality of facilitation, the discussion guide, and logistics. These tools can provide important insights into participants' sense of whether the program fulfilled their personal goals, and whether the study circles have affected their own behavior or beliefs.

To analyze the information you gather, participants' responses should be entered into a data base. Be careful not to collect more information than you need. (See sample "Participant Questionnaire" on pages 71-74. SCRC can provide you with an Excel™ data file that you can use to code and display the information you gather with this questionnaire.)

Informal meetings

Each of the various committees, teams, or task forces should carve out time every so often to reflect on how the program is shaping up. For example, how do both the facilitators and participants feel about the quality of facilitation, the discussion guide, and logistics (that is, accessibility of meeting places, transportation and child care)? How do your coordinator, working group, and coalition feel about the way things are going, and about how they have been working together? What new ideas and suggestions for action are emerging from the study circles? How is the work of the action task forces progressing?

It's best to keep the meetings focused, but informal. This approach makes it easier for self-reflection to become a regular part of your work, as compared with formal evaluations that may make it more difficult for people to express their true feelings. If some of the work is especially difficult, or if you believe that conflict may arise, find a neutral moderator – preferably someone not from your program staff – to lead the discussion. Draw on study circle principles (see page 2) to set ground rules and guide the discussion.

Using interviews and focus groups

When preparing a summary report on study circle participants' hopes, concerns, and ideas for change, these tools can be used as control groups to test or verify what you are learning from the session-by-session notes. This can be especially important if you are interested in gaining the attention of public officials, the news media, and grant makers.

In-depth interviews and focus groups

These powerful tools can be used to better understand the variety of ideas and themes that are documented in the brief session-by-session notes taken within each study circle. Focus groups and in-depth interviews allow researchers to probe more deeply into things, such as:

- ⊃ the underlying assumptions behind people's views.
- ⊃ the degree to which people are willing to accept certain trade-offs in order to achieve some version of their preferred solutions.
- ⊃ how people's views may change when they are presented with new information.

In-depth interviews and focus groups can be used to gauge participants' sense of the how well the program is organized, and whether it meets their and the organizers' expectations. No matter what your reason is for using these tools, you will probably want to work with professional researchers who can help you write the interview questions, set the right demographic targets when recruiting participants, and write a summary report of the findings.

♦ Recruit outside help (if you need it).

If the people on your documentation and evaluation committee don't have all the skills you need, here are a few things you can do to get help:

- ⊃ Check to see which coalition members or sponsoring organizations can contribute expertise and staff time.
- ⊃ Recruit people with skills in using computer databases to help meet information-management needs.
- ⊃ Ask community members to help you administer and collect questionnaires, do data entry, and work on newsletters that report results.
- ⊃ Inquire at a local college or university to find out if a faculty member or graduate student can help. Some graduate students may be able to do this work for academic credit as an independent study. Social science departments – especially sociology and political science – are the best places to look.
- ⊃ Enlist the services of an independent researcher. Some research firms will donate their services as a contribution to the community program.

◆ Reflect on the information you have collected.

Of course, it's no use collecting information if you don't use it. As the program unfolds, ask members of the working group, sponsoring organizations, facilitators, and participants to look at the information you collect and reflect on what it means. You can use these lessons to fine-tune your program and improve the next round of study circles.

◆ Communicate your findings.

Do your best to tell the community about the good ideas and energy produced by the study circles. At minimum, prepare a brief written report that summarizes basic information such as the number of participants and their demographic profile. If you use the questionnaire provided by SCRC, it will be fairly easy to organize much of your information.

Summary reports can also provide information about the individual changes, actions, and strategies for effecting meaningful change that emerge from the study circles. (See the sample document "Report on Program Outcomes" on pages 78-81.)

It is difficult to write reports that communicate an accurate sense of the opinions and judgments that emerge from study circles. However, information of this sort is invaluable to public officials and other leaders when they are faced with difficult decisions. To capture information that conveys such things as the underlying assumptions behind people's views, the extent to which participants may feel ambivalent or unsure, or their willingness to accept certain trade-offs, you must have a good session-by session record of the discussions within each study circle.

Moreover, the author of your summary report must have the skills to analyze, organize, and communicate these findings in a clear and accessible way. It is also a good idea to have a small committee of reviewers who can help refine the report.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. **How important is it to document and evaluate our study circle program?** First-time organizers of study circle programs sometimes assume (incorrectly!) that documentation and evaluation are add-ons – that is, they would be nice to do, but they aren't key to the success of their program. It is true that you may not need to conduct a very scientific evaluation, but without completing the most basic forms of documentation and evaluation, you greatly reduce your chances of meeting your goals. At a minimum, you need to keep track of the basics – things such as the number of participants and their demographic profile (age, gender, income, race/ethnicity, education level). You also need to keep track of the outcomes of the study circles if you want to be able to communicate the results of your program to public officials, grant-making foundations, news media, and other people who can help you improve the effectiveness of your program. When it comes to the question of evaluating how well you are doing in implementing the nuts and bolts of the program, the single most important thing you can do is monitor how the facilitators are doing and respond to their needs.

2. **How can SCRC help?** First, we encourage you to use the sample "Participant Questionnaire" on pages 71-74 to collect basic information. SCRC also can provide you with an Excel™ data file that you can use to code and display the information you gather with this questionnaire. We can also send you samples of tools and reports created by other study circle programs. If you give us enough lead time, SCRC staff can review your documentation and evaluation work plan, and offer editorial advice and feedback on materials you create. Unfortunately, we cannot design custom questionnaires or reports for individual programs. (If you design your own materials, please send us a copy so that we can share them with other program organizers.)

3. **How much does it cost to document and evaluate a study circle program?** Costs vary from one program to the next, depending on how comprehensive your documentation and evaluation processes are, and whether you can find volunteers to do a lot of the legwork. You can save time and money by using the sample "Participant Questionnaire" provided in this guide. Ask volunteers to help you customize the questionnaire, do data entry, or work on a newsletter that reports on program outcomes. If you need to enlist the services of a professional researcher, inquire at a local college or university to find out if a faculty member or graduate student can help; or you might find research firms that would donate their services.

Participant Questionnaire: Instructions for Administering

How to use this questionnaire

The following questionnaire should be given to participants at the end of the last small-group study circle session. ***Leave at least 15 minutes at the end of the session for people to complete the questionnaire.***

Talking points for facilitators

Facilitators should be encouraged to use the following talking points as they introduce the questionnaire to participants:

- The local program organizers are using the questionnaire to measure whether the study circle program met some of its goals, and to figure out how to improve the quality and effectiveness of future study circle programs.
- Participation in the survey is voluntary. No one has to fill it out, but we hope that everyone will.
- All responses will be confidential. We are not asking people to sign their names to the questionnaires.
- One of the most important goals of a study circle program is to bring together a diverse group of participants. This is why the questionnaire asks a few personal questions about age, income, education, racial and ethnic background, etc.
- Please be frank. We want to hear everyone's opinion and we want to know how participants really feel about their study circle experience – not how they think we want them to feel.
- If possible, please fill out the additional comments section at the end of the survey. If there is a question you wish we asked, but didn't, tell us what you think anyway!

How to analyze information collected with the questionnaire

- To analyze the information you gather, participants' responses should be entered into a data file. SCRC can provide you with a template Excel™ data file that you can use to code and display the information you gather with this questionnaire. It takes about two minutes to enter information from questions 1-22 for a single questionnaire into an Excel™ data file. If you also enter information from the two open-ended questions at the end of the survey, it will take about five minutes to enter the information for each questionnaire.
- Analyze the statistical information collected with this questionnaire using a statistical software package such as SPSS™ or SYSTAT™. Descriptive statistics, frequency counts, and cross-tabs (chi-square associations) are all that is necessary to get a sense of the data.
- Prepare a report based on your analysis of the information. Look at the sample "Report on Program Implementation" on pages 75-77 for one example of how you might organize your information.
- Make sure that other members of your working group (and, if possible, assorted program sponsors) have a chance to review and comment on the report before you release it.

Sample Document: Participant Questionnaire

Study circle location and/or facilitator ______________________________ Date __________

Participant Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in our study circle program! The purpose of this short survey is to collect some information about your experience with study circles, the discussion guide, your facilitator, and the overall program. Finally, we ask some questions about you. All responses will be confidential. No one will be able to trace your personal responses to you.

1. What effect, if any, has the study circle had upon the following?

	Increased	No Change	Decreased
Your ability to discuss issues openly and frankly.	☐	☐	☐
Your understanding of your own attitudes and beliefs.	☐	☐	☐
Your understanding of others' attitudes and beliefs.	☐	☐	☐
Your ability to communicate more effectively with people who may have different beliefs	☐	☐	☐

2. How did you hear about this study circle project?

- ☐ At school
- ☐ From a friend
- ☐ At work
- ☐ Through a community group/organization
- ☐ Through a religious organization or congregation
- ☐ From an area business
- ☐ From a state agency
- ☐ From an elected official
- ☐ News media
- ☐ Internet
- ☐ Other (Please Specify): __________________

3. Here is a list of things that some people do about government and politics. Have you done any of these things in the past year? *(Mark all that apply.)*

- ☐ Written to one of your elected representatives
- ☐ Attended a rally or speech
- ☐ Attended a public meeting on town or school affairs
- ☐ Signed a petition
- ☐ Served on a committee for some local organization
- ☐ Voted in an election
- ☐ Volunteered
- ☐ Written a letter to the paper
- ☐ Worked for a political party
- ☐ Been a member of some group like the League of Women Voters, or some other group which is interested in better government
- ☐ Served as an officer of some club or organization
- ☐ Worked informally with others to solve a community problem

DISCUSSION GUIDE

4. The discussion guide includes different points of view, without pushing any one point of view.

- ☐ Strongly Agree
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Neutral
- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Strongly Disagree

Continued on next page

5. **The discussion guide could be used by all kinds of people, across all walks of life.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

6. **The discussion guide stimulated meaningful discussion.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

7. **The discussion guide presented the right amount of material.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

FACILITATORS

8. **The facilitator(s) made everyone feel welcome.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

9. **The facilitator(s) did not try to influence the group with his or her own views.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

10. **The facilitator(s) intervened when someone monopolized the conversation.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

11. **The facilitator(s) explained the study circle principles and the difference between dialogue and debate.**

☐ Strongly Agree
☐ Agree
☐ Neutral
☐ Disagree
☐ Strongly Disagree

OVERALL EVALUATION

12. **The length of each meeting was...**

☐ Too Long
☐ Too Short
☐ Just Right

13. **The number of meetings was...**

☐ Too Many
☐ Too Few
☐ Just Right

14. **The number of people in my circle was...**

☐ Too Many
☐ Too Few
☐ Just Right

Continued on next page

15. Overall, I would rate the study circle program as...

☐ Very Good	☐ Neutral	☐ Poor
☐ Good		☐ Very Poor

PERSONAL INFORMATION

16. Your Ethnic, Racial, Cultural Background:

____

17. Which of the following best describes your level of education?

☐ Some High School
☐ High School Graduate
☐ Some College
☐ College Graduate
☐ Graduate School (advanced degree)

18. Age: __________

19. Gender:

☐ Female
☐ Male

20. How would you describe your political views?

☐ Very Conservative
☐ Conservative
☐ Moderate
☐ Liberal
☐ Very Liberal
☐ Don't know/haven't thought much about it

21. Which of the following best describes your annual income?

☐ Under $15,000
☐ $15,000 to $25,000
☐ $25,000 to $50,000
☐ $50,000 to $100,000
☐ Over $100,000

22. Describe what you liked most about the program.

23. Describe what you liked least about the program.

Sample Document: Report on Program Implementation

Ourtown Study Circles
Report
on
Program Implementation

[Date]

Note: This sample report focuses mainly on questions about the *process* of the study circles – what it took to organize them, demographics of the participants, how participants felt about the quality of facilitation, and so on. It does not report on the substance of the discussions, or program outcomes. See the sample document "Report on Program Outcomes" on pages 78-81 for an example of a report that emphasizes program outcomes.

Ourtown Study Circles began in October 1999 when a few interested citizens met with the town's Planning and Zoning Commission. They presented an idea to create a program that would bring townspeople together for public dialogue about how to address the challenges of the town's growth. Out of this meeting came a project that yielded fifteen study circles. Each circle met four times during March and April 2000, and used the publication *Smart Talk for Growing Communities: Meeting the Challenges of Growth and Development* to guide their discussions. The program involved 180 town residents in all, 160 of whom took part in the study circles as participants or facilitators. The main program goals were:

- Recruit participants that represent the diversity of people, resources, and interests in Ourtown.
- Present a report to the Planning and Zoning Commission that provides a solid sense of the town's citizens' thoughts, concerns, and desires for action to be included in the Year 2000 Plan of Conservation and Development.

To assess whether the Ourtown Study Circles reached its diversity goal, a questionnaire developed by the Study Circles Resource Center was given to participants at the April 2000 Action Forum. From approximately 130 participants, 48 surveys were returned for a response rate of 37%. The surveys were entered into Excel and analyzed by SPSS. The key findings are as follows:

- **Ourtown Study Circles had political diversity.** Just over a third (38%) of respondents stated they were either liberal or very liberal, roughly a third (29%) stated they were moderates, and nearly third (25%) stated they were conservative.
- **Ourtown Study Circles had gender diversity.** Out of 180 people who were involved with the project, 101 were women (56%).
- **The survey suggests that a majority of participants were older.** The single largest age group reported by the questionnaire was 41 to 50 at 38%. All told, over 51% of respondents were 41 years or older. Only 13% of respondents were 31 to 40 and 7% of respondents were 20 to 30.
- **The survey suggests that friends recruited a majority of participants.** 58% of respondents stated they heard about this study circle project from a friend. 27% heard about the study circle project from a community group or organization. 15% first heard about the circles in the local paper.

In addition to these findings, the questionnaire collected information from participants concerning the impacts of the discussion on their opinions and behavior, their overall experience of the program, with circle facilitators, and with the discussion guide.

What effect, if any, has the study circle had upon the following?

	Increased	No Change	Decreased
Your ability to discuss issues openly and frankly...	63%	38%	None
Your understanding of your own attitudes and beliefs...	67%	33%	None
Your understanding of others' attitudes and beliefs...	92%	8%	None
Your ability to communicate more effectively with people who may have different beliefs...	69%	29%	None

Overall Experience

The length of each meeting was...	2% said too long	2% said too short	92% said just right
The number of meetings were...	4% said too many	21% said too few	71% said just right
The number of people in my circle were...	2% said too many	20% said too few	74% said just right
Overall, I would rate the program as...	Nothing negative	Nothing neutral	96% were positive

Facilitation

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The facilitators made everyone feel welcome...	83%	2%	None
The facilitator did not try to influence the group with his or her own view...	77%	6%	2%
The facilitators intervened when someone monopolized the conversation....	71%	13%	None
The facilitators explained the study circle principles and the difference between dialogue and debate...	71%	13%	2%

Discussion Materials

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
The guide included different points of view, without advocating any one point of view...	83%	13%	None
The guide could be used by all kinds of people, across all walks of life...	86%	8%	6%
This guide stimulated meaningful discussion...	81%	13%	None
This guide presented the right amount of material...	79%	17%	4%

So, what does this information mean?

First, with a survey like this, everyone tends to be very positive about his or her experience. After all, no one wants to think they wasted their time. Thus, it is very important to look at the small differences.

- **The questionnaire suggests that a good number of participants felt that facilitators did not intervene enough.** Although no respondents disagreed with this question, 13% were neutral. This is large enough to be of concern.

- **The questionnaire suggests that a good number of participants felt that facilitators did not explain the difference between dialogue and debate.** 13% of respondents were neutral on this question too, along with 2% who disagreed. Again, large enough to be of concern.

- **The questionnaire suggests that a strong majority of participants felt the guide was useable by all kinds of people.** Only 6% of respondents disagreed outright with this question, and only 8% of respondents who responded to the questionnaire were neutral. Still, a total of 14% seem to be looking for some changes in the guide.

Sample Document: Report on Program Outcomes

Ourtown Study Circles
Report
on
Program Outcomes
[Date]

Note: This sample report focuses mainly on the *impact* that a study circle program to end racism can have on a community. It does not report on the questions about the process of the study circles – what it took to organize them, demographics of the participants, the quality of facilitation, and so on. See the sample document "Report on Program Implementation" on pages 75-77 for an example of that kind of report.

The Ourtown Study Circles Project began in late 1997 with three goals: to help our community build trust and increase the understanding necessary for finding common ground; develop relationships across racial divides; and to work together toward action. The program provides a safe and effective process for participants to talk about and work on issues of racism and race relations with people from different racial, ethnic, religious, socioeconomic, and ideological backgrounds.

In the last three years, the outcomes of Ourtown Study Circles – from individual volunteer efforts, to projects requiring heavy doses of funding and political support – have continued to multiply.

The outcomes of this program are many and varied. The most immediate kinds of change happen when people gain new understanding of issues of racism and race relations, and form new relationships. After only a short time we are seeing that these changes in personal understanding can readily translate into new individual or small-group commitments to action.

In some instances, participants in the circles have decided to add their energies and ideas to efforts already under way in Ourtown. Or, when they bring their new ideas and approaches back to their own organizations, they sow the seeds of institutional change.

Other kinds of change that are emerging from the study circles are more complex and take longer to take shape: new policies; new decisions; changes in the allocation of resources; new tools for citizen input and collaboration with government.

In the examples below, we haven't told the detailed story behind each outcome. But, in each case, the Ourtown Study Circles have inspired individuals, groups, institutions and policy makers to make a difference.

1. Scope of the program:

- 62 total study circles have been held since the project began in 1997 (with over 600 people attending)

2. Changes in attitudes and behavior

- In a recent survey, over 90% of participants say that they learned a great deal from participating in the study circles: about themselves, about racism, and about others who are different from themselves.
- 77% of participants report deepening their commitment to speak out and act against racist practices.
- 77% of participants report that they either developed or intended to develop relationships with people who are different from themselves as a result of the dialogue.
- Many study circles have met informally to continue discussions and build relationships; one has met for over 2 years.
- A white business owner realized that he hired people through the old-boy network and thus didn't include people of color. He has since changed his hiring practices.
- A study circle participant who was in a circle with a police officer helped defuse an arrest of a young man by the same police officer at a chance encounter on the street.

3. Study circle participants working together to make a difference:

- Students from Ourtown University founded a multicultural student organization called PointZero that sponsored an educational forum on police profiling
- Participants from a study circle which included faith leaders helped form "Acts," a faith-based, diverse, community organizing group
- Members of a study circle organized a music camp that brought together urban and suburban youngsters who worked on gospel and traditional church music and performed a musical celebrating diversity.

- A study circle that included representatives from two ethnic community centers has helped to ease tensions between longtime Italian-American residents and growing numbers of newcomers from Southeast Asia. Members of both organizations now work together on community projects and attend each other's events.

- A large grocery store provided buses to under-served areas of the community.

- Mothers met with the police chief to express their concerns about unfair police treatment of young people of color.

- Racially different congregations have paired for study circles and have deepened their ties, attending each other's houses of worship for fellowship and education.

- Study circle participants have produced written materials, including letters to the editor, and a position paper.

4. Actions supported or initiated by the Ourtown Study Circles Coalition:

- A local shopping mall instituted a "Bill of Rights" for consumers, and held diversity training for shop clerks and security personnel to respond to incidents of people of color being treated unfairly.

- Recent meetings with members of the banking community are addressing goals for hiring, retention, and lending policies.

- Community events have been sponsored by the project: Two years ago a community breakfast drew more than 500 people in support of the goals of the project. Last spring the Ourtown Stage hosted a play *A Raisin in the Sun,* which featured a night devoted to OSC and included an insert about it in the playbill.

- An "Action Guide" was produced to provide study circle participants with information on community organizations that do work to end racism in the greater Ourtown region.

- Using race as an index, a benchmarking committee gathered statistics on such things as health and safety, income and education levels. This information is being used as a baseline to measure future change that may be generated by the study circles.

- A Rapid Response Listserv was established to help mobilize community response to acts of racism.

- Interfaith study circles brought together urban and suburban residents from wide-ranging ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Their frank discussions on employment and race led to the formation of a program to help people prepare to enter the workforce.
- A committee was formed at the Chamber of Commerce to increase the number of people of color on nonprofit and corporate boards of directors.
- Program staff and volunteers regularly make presentations on ending racism to a variety of community organizations.

5. Youth Activities:

- Study circles have been held within and between urban and suburban high schools during and after school hours.
- Diversity forums were held with all sophomores and juniors at Ourtown Central High School.
- An "Eracism" project was developed partnering Ourtown University and Ourtown City School District that has held dialogue with college and high school students, and had them critique and rewrite our Youth Dialogue Guide.
- A "Day of Dialogue" was held with area high school students in conjunction with Ourtown Stage's play *A Raisin in the Sun.*

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Recruit Participants and Form Diverse Groups

Step 5

The hallmark of a strong study circle program is diversity. The goal is to get as many different kinds of people involved as possible.

- When people from different backgrounds and walks of life talk about possible solutions to common problems, they form new relationships and networks, and come up with innovative ideas.
- A program that involves a broad cross section of the community is more likely to benefit the community as a whole.
- Having a diverse mix of participants helps make for lively and rewarding dialogue.

The most important factor in recruiting a broad diversity of participants is a strong, diverse coalition. Each coalition member reaches a different group of people. Every time a new organization joins the coalition, the program's capacity for recruitment gets stronger.

What to do

- Decide how many and what kinds of people you are trying to reach.
- Figure out who can reach out to these diverse participants.
- Plan outreach strategies.
- Consider outreach tools.
- Give coalition members recruiting assignments.
- Work hard to recruit the unaffiliated.
- Work out a plan to ensure diversity in each circle.

Establish a recruitment committee

Although everyone on the coalition is expected to recruit, it's important to have a committee that is in charge of recruitment. This committee should focus on the program's overall recruitment goals, and figure out ways to help the whole coalition meet those goals.

How to do it

Many kinds of leaders

The word "leader" can apply to all kinds of people – not just mayors or school superintendents, but community organizers, club presidents, youth group leaders, owners of small businesses, and others. Anyone who is trusted and respected for ability to solve problems is a leader – and is someone who can help you recruit people for study circles.

What is "diversity"?

Think broadly about diversity. Consider race and ethnicity, gender, age, background, interests, education level, socioeconomic level, political leanings, and locale. Also make sure to include a mix of grass-roots participants, highly visible community leaders, and people who hold positions at all levels in all kinds of institutions and organizations.

♦ Decide how many and what kinds of people you are trying to reach.

Refer back to the recruitment goals generated by the whole coalition. As a recruitment committee, you will revisit some of the coalition's earlier conversation, and make it even more specific:

- ⊃ How many people do we need to involve in order to bring about the kinds of changes we are aiming for in our community?
- ⊃ Who are the different kinds of people we need to recruit to make our program diverse? Brainstorm a list. ("Diversity" means different things to different people, so take the time to explore each other's views and then decide what diversity means to the group as a whole.)
- ⊃ Why would people from each of these groups (or sectors, or backgrounds) want to participate?
- ⊃ What might keep people in each group from participating?

♦ Figure out who can reach out to these diverse participants.

Consider: Are there groups or individuals on our coalition who can reach out to different kinds of people? If not, who can help bring them on board?

♦ Plan outreach strategies.

To sell your program, use a multi-faceted approach, combining personal invitations and general publicity. Remember, people need to hear the same message at least three times before it begins to register.

- ⊃ A personal invitation is the best recruiting strategy. There is no substitute! You can do this through face-to-face visits and through phone calls. The coordinator and coalition members can introduce the program to lots of people by speaking at community groups or meetings.
- ⊃ Whenever possible, give people a chance to take part in a sample study circle session. Be sure to allow plenty of time for questions and answers. And explain how the study circle program can help them make a difference on the issue, form new partnerships and relationships, and strengthen their own organization. Capture the excitement that is generated *on the spot* by having sign-up forms with you. (See sample "Form for Participant Registration" on page 88).
- ⊃ Ask volunteers to make phone calls to follow up on letters or presentations.

◆ Consider outreach tools.

The most effective tools deliver your message to people in ways they like to receive information. Think about the people you're trying to reach. Do they read the newspaper, or are they more likely to read a church bulletin? Do they listen to the radio? If so, which stations? Do they read fliers on grocery store bulletin boards? Do they use e-mail, or get an employee newsletter at work?

Plan on using a variety of tools so that people will hear your message several ways – for example, through the mass media (newspapers, radio, TV), direct mail (letters, notes, brochures), and a personal contact (phone calls, presentations, meetings).

◆ Give coalition members recruiting assignments.

Provide coalition members with the advice and tools that have been developed by the communication committee (see "Plan and Carry Out Communication" on pages 39-54). Include a few key talking points about the program that they can use wherever they go. Have them carry sign-up forms wherever they go. Remember that active recruitment is the most effective.

Ask the members of your coalition to reach out to people in their networks. In many programs, coalition members are asked to recruit a specific number of participants. Some programs recruit through the workplace. This is especially effective when CEOs and other key leaders are on board, encouraging people to participate.

Representatives from the faith community might be asked to recruit a certain number of people from their congregations. Leaders of service clubs, such as Kiwanis, Lions, or Rotary, can announce the program during their meetings and personally invite people. In all these cases, the recruiting will be easier if the recruiter is supplied with instructions, talking points, guidelines for recruiting different kinds of people, and sign-up sheets.

Imagine you were being recruited

You might hear about study circles from a friend, then from co-workers or from people in your congregation; you might see a sign at the Laundromat, or hear a public service announcement on the local radio station.

Once people hear about study circles a number of times, from people and sources they trust, they are much more likely to take part.

Outreach tools

As you consider your tools, remember that you will be working closely with the communication committee. These tools often include:

- talking points
- basic brochures
- contact information for follow-up appointments

Reaching the hard-to-reach and the unaffiliated

Study circle programs try to include people who don't normally take part in community events. To reach these people, it will take more than a newspaper article, radio announcement, or flier. What can you do?

One program collaborated with a mom-and-pop magazine store in a low-income neighborhood. The store agreed to host an orientation and hold a sample study circle for its customers.

The owner posted fliers in the window and handed them out to customers. The results: Fifty people attended the orientation, and took part in a sample study circle.

♦ Work hard to recruit the unaffiliated.

One of the biggest challenges is to recruit people who don't often get involved in community events. This will take extra work, but without it, you will be missing many important voices in your program. Here are a few suggestions:

- ⊃ Go where people socialize. Just because social groups aren't considered "political" doesn't mean their members aren't interested in critical issues. Think about bridge clubs, bowling leagues, sports clubs, youth groups, sewing circles, and ethnic organizations. Don't overlook local mom-and-pop establishments and businesses where people are likely to socialize, such as barbershops or hair salons.
- ⊃ Go where people work. In some communities, businesses have given time off to employees who wanted to take part in study circles.

♦ Work out a plan to ensure diversity in each circle.

The recruiting committee is also responsible for making sure that each study circle has a diverse mix of participants. You should use more than one of these methods:

- ⊃ Design your sign-up sheet to collect basic information – such as name, age, occupation, gender, ethnic/racial group – and then use that data to help arrange diverse groups. *Make sure you ask for preferred times and days.*
- ⊃ Bring people together in a large group. Post different days and times around the room, and ask people to select a time that fits their schedule. Also, ask them to join groups with people they don't know, and who don't look like them. After the groups are formed, check to see how diverse they are, and adjust if necessary.
- ⊃ Pair up dissimilar organizations. Form groups that are half from one organization, half from the other.
- ⊃ In a large group, assign numbers as people come in, and then form groups according to numbers. This way you will separate people who have come in together.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. How can we reach beyond "the choir" to recruit people who aren't usually involved in community affairs? Your best chance of reaching these people is to work through the grass-roots organizations and groups they belong to. Go where people worship, study, and socialize. Recruit people where they work. In one small town, where lots of people are related, organizers used family groups as their recruitment path. Remember, with each round of study circles you will have a new group of participants who can help by recruiting their friends and family members and other people in their networks.

2. How can we make sure our study circles are diverse? Think in terms of categories: age, neighborhood, socioeconomic level, profession, education, gender, race, ethnicity, politics, faith groups. Then, come up with strategies for reaching the people in those categories – and aim for representation from each group. Put yourself in their shoes and try to think of the reasons they would want to join a study circle.

3. If we use the media to advertise the program, will that draw enough participants? While newspapers, radio, and television are very important, don't rely on them exclusively. Articles and public service announcements can help to create a "buzz" in the community, but it's the personal touch that gets people involved. Making presentations at meetings, and issuing personal invitations should be your primary strategy.

4. How can we make sure that people and groups with different views of the issue are included? Even if people hold very different opinions about an issue, they usually can be convinced to participate in a conversation when they know it is aimed at the whole community. Try to bring opposing groups into the organizing coalition, so that you're sending the message from the beginning that everyone is welcome in this conversation about a shared concern.

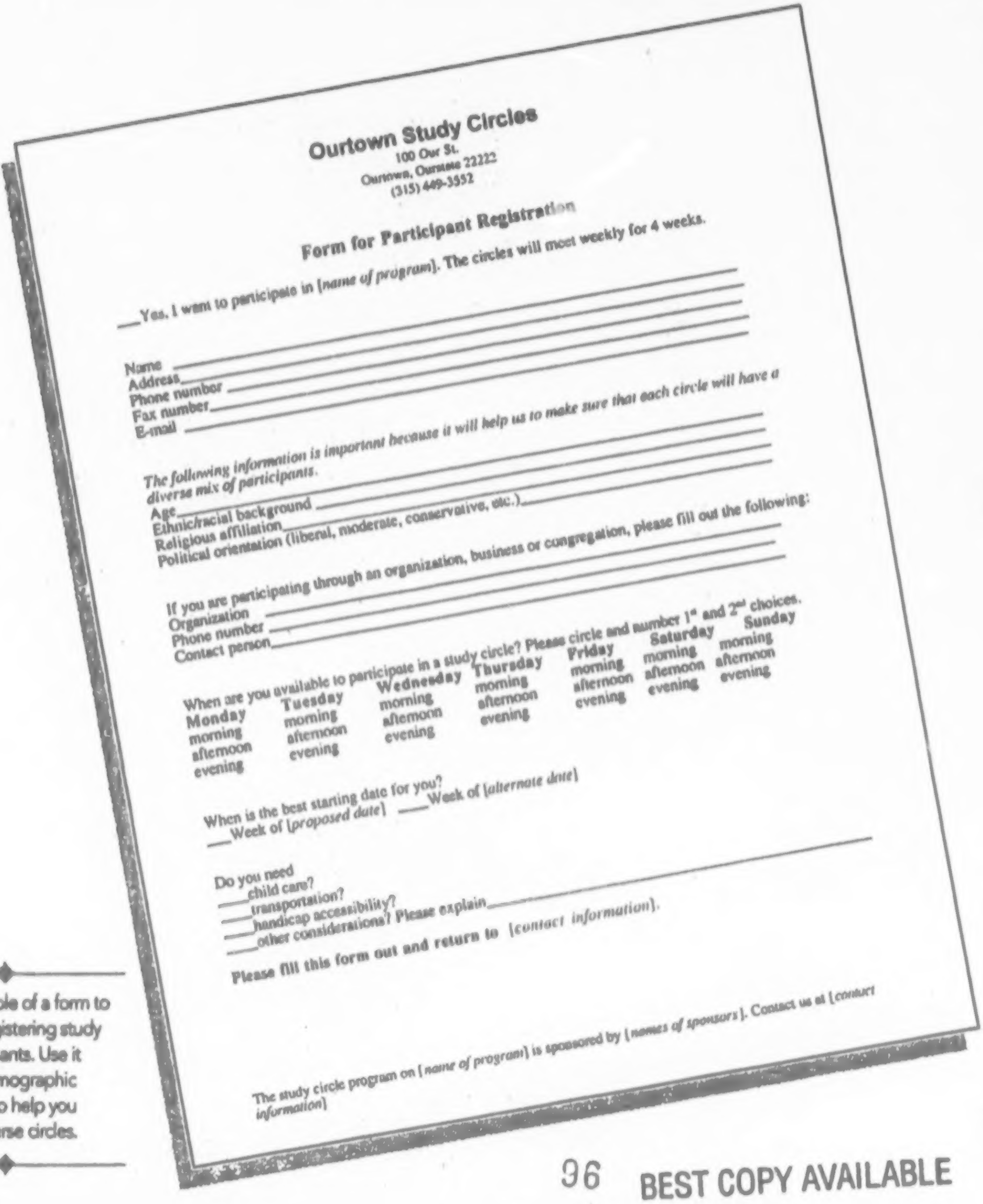
Recruiting young people

Most public issues – from crime to race relations to substance abuse – directly involve and affect young people. Remember, adding young people to the conversation will create new energy, and create new kinds of relationships and solutions.

In order to recruit young people, it is absolutely essential to have them on your coalition. They will know where other young people spend their time, and they can do the best job of recruiting other teenagers and young adults. With that as a given, what else can you do to recruit large numbers of diverse young people into your program?

- Involve youth in every phase of the work – organizing, recruiting, facilitating, and training facilitators.
- Go where young people are. Visit schools, community clubs, places of worship, and places where kids "hang out."
- Ask schools to offer students extra credit for participating in study circles.

Sample Document: Form for Participant Registration



Ourtown Study Circles

100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Form for Participant Registration

__Yes, I want to participate in [*name of program*]. The circles will meet weekly for 4 weeks.

Name __________
Address__________
Phone number __________
Fax number__________
E-mail __________

The following information is important because it will help us to make sure that each circle will have a diverse mix of participants.

Age__________
Ethnic/racial background __________
Religious affiliation__________
Political orientation (liberal, moderate, conservative, etc.)__________

If you are participating through an organization, business or congregation, please fill out the following:

Organization __________
Phone number __________
Contact person__________

When are you available to participate in a study circle? Please circle and number 1st and 2nd choices.

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**	**Sunday**
morning	morning	morning	morning	morning	morning	morning
afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon
evening	evening	evening	evening	evening	evening	evening

When is the best starting date for you?
___Week of [*proposed date*] ____Week of [*alternate date*]

Do you need
____child care?
____transportation?
____handicap accessibility?
____other considerations? Please explain__________

Please fill this form out and return to [*contact information*].

The study circle program on [*name of program*] is sponsored by [*names of sponsors*]. Contact us at [*contact information*]

This is a sample of a form to use when registering study circle participants. Use it to collect demographic information to help you organize diverse circles.

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Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Plan for Action, Including the Action Forum

Step 5

In the introduction to this guide, we said that community-wide study circle programs help people lend their hearts, hands, and minds to the task of solving public problems. The process provides a way for large numbers of community members with different backgrounds, experiences, and views to listen to each other, and then work together productively.

Typically, the action coming from study circles falls into various categories. (See "Action and Change in Study Circle Programs" on page 92). Remember that a large, diverse study circle program will result in many different kinds of change, happening at all levels in the community. For individuals, ideas for change start through the dialogue process. Collective action and change often begin after the round of study circles, when participants have the chance to pool their action ideas. It is these ideas for collective change that can require additional oversight and resources.

To move from dialogue to action, plans need to be put in place at the beginning.

What to do

- Refer back to your program goals.
- Decide how much support you can provide for action initiatives.
- Have a conversation about how change occurs in your community.
- Develop a process for collecting and prioritizing ideas from the study circles.
- Plan the action forum, a tool for combining the work of individual study circles.
- Track and support the action and change efforts.

Establish an action committee

Find some people to focus on this phase of the work, since the coordinator and other committees will be occupied getting the circles up and running. The role of the action committee is to help develop a process for the study circle action ideas to get started, not to decide what action will take place.

How to do it

◆ Refer back to your program goals.

Review the decisions the whole coalition made about program goals and supporting action during its planning conversations.

Once you've reviewed the goals, consider the following: Does the action committee have the right diversity of people and skills to help move from dialogue to action? Who else is needed for the committee?

◆ Decide how much support you can provide for action initiatives.

With members of the coalition, action committee, and coordinator, talk about what will happen when the study circles conclude. Consider these questions:

- ⊃ What kinds of support can we give to the action ideas (coordinating, administrative, tracking, etc.)?
- ⊃ Will we help set up task forces, oversee task forces, write a report, link participants to other related initiatives in the community?
- ⊃ Who will plan the action forum?
- ⊃ What kinds of resources do we need?
- ⊃ What will we do with the study circle action ideas that the task forces are not working on?

Here are some possible levels of support:

- ⊃ The organizers plan the action forum, but do not provide ongoing assistance.

OR

- ⊃ The organizers plan the action forum and provide *limited* support for the task forces.

OR

- ⊃ The organizers take responsibility for providing *ongoing* support for the action ideas emerging from the study circles. This may require additional staff.

- ◆ **Action forum**
  The large-group meeting at the end of a round of study circles designed to pool the action ideas from individual study circles.
- ◆ **Task force/action group**
  A new group that forms following an action forum to carry forward an action idea.

Dialogue to action

Carry the message of **dialogue to action** throughout the program.

- ◆ Talk about it in written materials.
- ◆ Announce action forum at kickoff.
- ◆ Help facilitators understand problem-solving goals of the program.
- ◆ Make level of support for action initiatives clear.

Community-wide programs = dialogue + action

◆ Have a conversation about how change occurs in your community.

Understanding how change occurs in your community is key to moving from dialogue to action. Ideas for change often stall because the program organizers haven't given enough thought to questions of what meaningful change looks like, and how to achieve it.

Below are some questions to consider, as you think about how to bring about change in your community.

- What would genuine, beneficial change look like? How will we know if we are successful? What are our short-term and long-term goals?
- Who needs to be involved for change to happen? At what point in the process do they need to be involved?
- How will we get community leaders who are not part of the study circles to take the recommendations seriously?
- What information will be needed to help change occur? What form should the information take?
- What obstacles might get in the way of change occurring? How can we address these obstacles?
- Are there people/groups that should be kept informed along the way?

Think again about organizations and agencies already working on the issue, and reach out to them. It will increase your chances of success if some community leaders lend their support to the study circle program *up front*. They can do this by being part of the coalition, participating in the circles, and committing to listening to the recommendations that come from the circles – and acting on them whenever possible.

Moving from study circles to action

People move from the study circles into action in many ways. Programs use any or all of these methods:

- Sometimes, people take action on their own.
- A single study circle adopts an action idea, and moves it forward.
- Ideas are pooled across the circles, and a few, well-supported themes emerge. Participants then sign up to work on a particular task force, forming new groups.

Action and Change in Study Circle Programs

Kind of change	How does it happen?	Example
Changes in individual behavior and attitudes	Better understanding of the issues and of one another inspires people to "make a difference."	A participant in a community-wide program on racism decides never again to let racist remarks go by without a comment.
New relationships and networks	Trust and understanding develop between participants in the dialogue.	Following study circles on community-police relationships, young people and police officers hold weekly meetings.
New working collaborations	Individuals and organizations develop new relationships and new ideas for solutions.	After study circles on neighborhood issues, residents, police officers, and mental health advocates create an emergency team to help mentally ill people who wander the streets.
Institutional changes	Leaders and/or members of an institution gain new insights in study circles that lead to changes within the institution and in the larger community.	After doing study circles on race, leaders of several banks work with others to improve banking services to communities of color.
Changes in public policy	Public officials help organize study circles, and pledge to work with citizens to implement action ideas. OR Public officials take part in the organizing and dialogue, and gain new insights that have an impact on their policymaking. OR Information from the study circles is collected and reported to decision makers.	Following study circles on education, participants develop a plan to close the gap in achievement between the races. The school board – a leading organizer of the circles – funds the plan and helps carry it out. After participating in study circles, a school superintendent creates new policies to involve parents in the district's schools. A report from study circles on growth and sprawl is turned over to the planning board, which uses this information to help shape the town's strategic plan.
Changes in community dynamics	Many hundreds of people take part in study circles. Once there is a "critical mass" of people who have a new understanding of issues and of one another, their capacity for community work increases.	Study circles on race relations happen in a community over years. In all kinds of settings, public meetings begin to operate according to study circle principles. People learn to work together across differences, and feel a stronger sense of community.
Changes in a community's public life	Once people see the benefits of large-scale dialogue to action, they make it an ongoing part of how their community works.	After a round of study circles on education, the school district decides to use study circles routinely to involve citizens in creating and implementing its annual school-improvement plan.

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◆ **Develop a process for collecting and prioritizing ideas from the study circles.**

Decide what the facilitator/recorder should record from each study circle. (See the suggestions on setting up a recording process on pages 66 and 102-103). Then consider these questions:

- Who will be responsible for collecting the records from each study circle?
- Who will review the records and put them in a workable format?
- What is the best way to track themes, trends, and categories of ideas as they emerge?
- How will we pool the ideas across the circles, and choose overall priorities?
- How many action ideas do we think we are able to work with?

Some programs combine records from all the study circles into a report for the program as a whole. This can be distributed at the action forum, used to give updates to public officials and journalists, and can form the basis of significant input into policy decisions.

The multi-voting decision process

Multi-voting is a process for narrowing down a long list of items and choosing priorities. Work on large sheets of paper that everyone can see.

- Clarify the meaning of each item before you begin the vote. Combine or group similar ideas first.
- Give every person three votes. Use colored stickers, or some other visual method of voting.
- Ask everyone to vote for the ideas they like best. They can use all their stickers in one category, or spread them around. (Having people move around in the voting process will energize the room.)
- Serve refreshments.
- Tally votes and identify the desired number of priorities. Be clear with the group what will happen to all the ideas, including those not chosen. A written report of the process can capture all ideas, even those with less support.

Elements of an action forum

- Summary remarks by a representative from each study circle
- A rundown of themes and top priorities emerging from the groups
- A process for the whole group to choose priorities from among the many ideas
- A chance for people to sign up for the action groups/task forces
- Celebration, food, and fun – giving people a chance to cement their new relationships, and to meet people from other study circles
- Thanks to organizers, coalition members, facilitators, and participants
- Remarks by community and project leaders
- An announcement of plans for the future: Explain how the program will support the task forces; how the program will keep participants and the community informed about the action efforts; a timeline for a future round of study circles.

♦ Plan the action forum, a tool for combining the work of individual study circles.

The action forum is a community event designed to tie together the work of the individual circles, and help participants move to individual and collective action. At the forum, groups can share their ideas for action, and participants can join or create action efforts.

The action forum should take place *no more than two weeks after each round of study circles,* to effectively build on the momentum of the discussions.

As you plan the action forum, start thinking about who might convene the task forces. Choose someone who can help a group get started; ideally, this will be someone who knows a lot about the issue.

Assist task force leaders before they begin their work

It is very important to work with task force leaders before they begin their work. To give them the greatest chance of success, encourage them to use these guidelines as they launch the task forces:

- ⊃ When establishing task forces, try to include in each task force people who have professional expertise or some decision-making power on the issue. This will help the group learn more about the issue and give more access to official decision-making channels.
- ⊃ Establish ground rules. Many task forces use some version of study circle ground rules.
- ⊃ To build relationships and establish trust in new groups, use Session 1 (or more) of your issue discussion guide. Ask people to share some of their thoughts about the study circle experience they just completed.

- Establish a process for working together, including decision making, a timeline, and a meeting schedule.
- Clarify your goals. What would genuine, beneficial change look like? How will we know if we are successful? What are our short-term and long-term goals?
- Assess the capacity of your group. What does the task force need in order to get the job done (for example, leadership training, better group skills, better connections to decision makers, more information, more administrative support)? How can we get what we need?
- Ask yourselves, "Who else should be in this task force? How can we invite them to join us?"
- Find out what else is going on in the community related to this action idea? How can we connect to those efforts?
- Stay in touch. How will our work be connected to the overall study circle program? How will we report our outcomes?

◆ **Track and support the action and change efforts.**

Help the task forces in the following ways:

- Stay in touch with task force leaders. Hold occasional large-group meetings to share progress and challenges, and to stay connected.
- Focus attention on the task forces to build community support and momentum. Consider a newsletter, a web site, or a column in the local newspaper to share progress reports.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. What kinds of action and change come from study circles? In a large-scale study circle program, action and change happen at all levels – in individual attitude and behavior change, in the creation of new and stronger relationships among diverse people, in new collaborative efforts, in institutional changes, and in policy or governmental changes.

2. How does change come about? For individuals, ideas for change start through the dialogue process. Collective action and change often begin after the round of study circles, when participants have the chance to pool their action ideas at the action forum. Some kinds of change happen quickly. People may decide to add their energies and ideas to efforts already under way in the community. Or, when they bring their new ideas and approaches back to their own organizations, they sow the seeds of institutional change.

Other kinds of change from study circles are more complex and take longer to shape. These include new policies, changes in the allocation of resources, and new institutional directions. In these cases, study circles are often part of a larger picture, in which many factors are at play.

3. What can we do to make sure that the talk will really lead to results? Plan ahead. Do everything you can to make sure there are people and resources available to support the action groups as they move forward – with administrative help, assistance, research, access to decision makers – whatever it takes to help them achieve their goals.

4. What are some specific examples of outcomes that have come from study circle programs?

- ➲ New and strengthened youth mentoring programs (many)
- ➲ New and strengthened school-business partnerships (many)
- ➲ A new multiracial "Unity Choir"(Lima, Ohio)
- ➲ Changing a long-standing community policy on after-school and evening athletics (Alread, Arkansas)
- ➲ New hiring policies in government agencies to better reflect the diversity of the community (Springfield, Illinois)

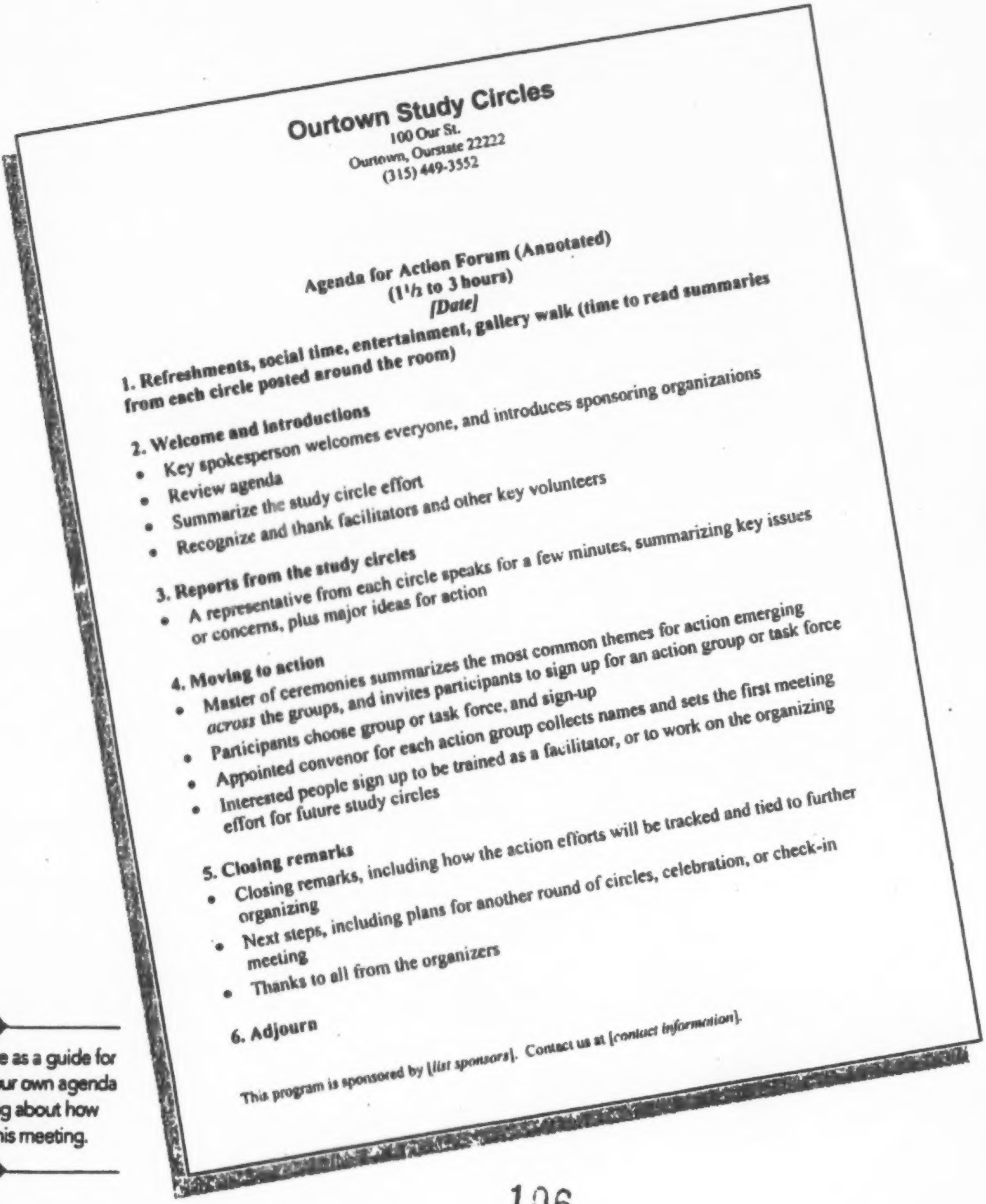
- Community-wide diversity celebrations (many)
- A new city-wide violence prevention center (Lima, Ohio)
- Modifications to a five-year strategic plan for a school district (SAD 50, Maine)
- School beautification project (Inglewood, California)
- Bi-lingual mentoring efforts with students teaching adults (Inglewood, California)
- New supermarket in an inner-city area (Fort Myers, Florida)

5. Who implements the action ideas that come from study circles? Sometimes, study circle participants find people who are already working on the issue, and funnel their ideas and energies into programs already under way. Sometimes participants form task forces to develop and implement new initiatives.

6. What happens if people put forward action ideas that are controversial or "off-the-wall"? This isn't likely to happen because the study circle process – facilitated, constructive deliberation – helps people to identify common concerns. Usually, at the end of the study circles, action ideas from the circles are pooled and prioritized so that those with the broadest support, not the controversial ones, become the highest priorities.

7. How much responsibility – if any – do program organizers have for outcomes? Since action ideas are generated in the study circles, it is usually the participants who take responsibility for the initiatives they propose. However, in the early planning, the steering committee should decide what role(s) it might play in implementing action ideas. This should be communicated clearly to participants and to the community at large. *For example*, in some programs, organizers establish a committee to oversee and support the task forces. In other places, new projects and task forces operate independently.

Sample Document: Agenda for Action Forum (Annotated)



Ourtown Study Circles

100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Agenda for Action Forum (Annotated)
(1½ to 3 hours)
[Date]

1. Refreshments, social time, entertainment, gallery walk (time to read summaries from each circle posted around the room)

2. Welcome and introductions

- Key spokesperson welcomes everyone, and introduces sponsoring organizations
- Review agenda
- Summarize the study circle effort
- Recognize and thank facilitators and other key volunteers

3. Reports from the study circles

- A representative from each circle speaks for a few minutes, summarizing key issues or concerns, plus major ideas for action

4. Moving to action

- Master of ceremonies summarizes the most common themes for action emerging *across* the groups, and invites participants to sign up for an action group or task force
- Participants choose group or task force, and sign-up
- Appointed convenor for each action group collects names and sets the first meeting
- Interested people sign up to be trained as a facilitator, or to work on the organizing effort for future study circles

5. Closing remarks

- Closing remarks, including how the action efforts will be tracked and tied to further organizing
- Next steps, including plans for another round of circles, celebration, or check-in meeting
- Thanks to all from the organizers

6. Adjourn

This program is sponsored by [*list sponsors*]. Contact us at [*contact information*].

Use this outline as a guide for developing your own agenda and for thinking about how you will lead this meeting.

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Recruit, Train, and Support Facilitators

Step 5

The best study circle programs *combine* excellent community organizing and excellent facilitation. Highly skilled facilitators ensure a quality discussion in each circle. Effective facilitator training develops study circle discussion leaders who understand the principles and techniques of effective small-group deliberation *and* the broader civic context in which the facilitation takes place.

A group of well-trained facilitators is key to a successful program. Good study circle facilitators come from all age groups and all walks of life. Some have previous training; some do not. What they have in common is an interest in how groups work, the skills to guide the conversation, and a desire to help people have a productive experience. They are good listeners and relate well to many different kinds of people. Above all, they are interested in improving their communities.

What to do

- Contact SCRC for a copy of *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators.*
- Identify a few skilled trainers.
- Plan and schedule one or more trainings.
- Recruit a diverse pool of facilitators.
- Prepare materials to help facilitators succeed.
- Help facilitators decide how they will handle note taking.
- Provide ongoing support for facilitators.
- Keep expanding the pool of facilitators.

RECRUITING
AND TRAINING
FACILITATORS

How to do it

◆ Contact SCRC for a copy of *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*.

This is our comprehensive guide for recruiting and training facilitators. (You can download the guide from our website at www.studycircles.org) The coordinator and others who are responsible for this part of the program should review this publication as they plan. Ultimately, every person who trains facilitators for your study circle program should have a copy of this guide.

◆ Identify a few skilled trainers.

Begin by identifying some potential trainers. Ask someone whose opinion you trust to recommend a trainer. Is there a community college or university that offers courses in facilitation, mediation, or conflict resolution? Who teaches the courses? Is there a list of graduates? Is there a mediation center in town? Where does it find its mediators, and who trains them? How about corporate trainers or facilitators? Think about adding these organizations to your coalition, with the goal of having them assume this part of the work. Keep in mind that you will most likely need to pay trainers for their time.

◆ Plan and schedule one or more trainings.

Working with the trainer or trainers, decide how many trainings to plan. How many people need to be trained? For larger programs, plan to hold several training events to give people more options.

A training should give potential facilitators an opportunity to learn and practice the skills they will need to conduct a study circle; it should also provide information about the overall program, so that facilitators will see their work in the broader context of the community-wide model.

Facilitators should be trained a month or two before the circles begin. Allow *at least* a full day – or two half days – for the basic training. Most communities schedule additional practice time to provide more experience for new facilitators. Consult the training guide for ideas on the basic agenda, content, exercises, and practice sessions. Remember, the more training and practice facilitators have in preparation for the circles, the more successful they will be.

Step 5

◆ **Recruit a diverse pool of facilitators.**

Your facilitator corps should be diverse, so you should identify and recruit potential facilitators from every sector of the community. You are looking for people who are comfortable with all kinds of people; have the ability to listen well and "read" group dynamics; know how to help move conversation forward, and deal with different communication styles; can guide a conversation without adding their own opinion.

Consider these groups:

- Social workers
- Group leaders from congregations
- Mediators
- People trained in conflict resolution
- Therapists and counselors
- Corporate facilitators
- Senior citizens
- High school or college students; students trained in peer mediation
- Educators of all ages (remember retired teachers)
- Clergy
- Parents
- People interested in public issues

Most study circle programs use co-facilitators for each study circle. While this requires recruiting and training more people, it offers several advantages:

- The pair can model diversity in race, age, gender, and other differences.
- Pairing experienced facilitators with beginners helps bring new people along.
- Two people can get a better "read" on how the group is going.
- Responsibility can be shared for planning and implementing.
- Working in teams brings different skills to bear on the process.

Contact SCRC for a copy of ***A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators,*** a complete resource for recruiting, training, evaluating, and sustaining your study circle facilitators.

◆ Prepare materials to help facilitators succeed.

You can help your facilitators do their job well by providing them with some support materials. For example, give them a written description of the overall project – its sponsors, its goals, and its scope. Be sure to include important information, such as the date, time, and location of the kickoff, and action forum. You should also give them forms (with instructions) for evaluating the process and tracking the discussion as it develops.

Another important piece is a step-by-step outline of each of the sessions, including approximate times for each part of the discussion. Pay particular attention to the final session where the dialogue focuses on action. Work with the trainers to make sure facilitators are equipped to lead brainstorming sessions, and have the necessary skills and written materials to develop, articulate, and prioritize their group's action ideas, as they prepare for the action forum.

◆ Help facilitators decide how they will handle note taking.

Note taking can be a simple, effective way to capture and share the wisdom that study circles generate. These records help create connections between the study circles, and they can form the basis of a report that extends the message and power of the study circles to the broader community. (For tips on note-taking, see page 66.

Here are some suggestions for facilitators:

When you recruit people to fill the recorder's role, look for good listeners.

- ⊃ They must be committed to representing what the *group as a whole* thinks.
- ⊃ Two facilitators, working as a team, can take turns leading the discussion and taking the notes.
- ⊃ A facilitator who is working alone can ask for a volunteer from the group to take notes.

Give the note takers guidance ahead of time.

- ⊃ Capture the main ideas and keep track of the direction that the conversation takes.
- ⊃ Use the language of the speaker when you can. Don't paraphrase.
- ⊃ Note taking should serve the discussion, not distract attention from it.

- Check your notes with the group. Did you capture what the speaker meant?
- If your group's notes will become part of a report, be sure to write enough to make sense to someone outside the group.
- Include the date, location, session, and the group's name.

The note taker and facilitator work as a team, especially in the last fifteen minutes of each session.

At the end of the session, the facilitator should ask the recorder to give a brief summary of the discussion (based on the notes). Ask the group to make sure that the notes truly reflect the discussion.

Use recording forms.

In preparation for report writing and for the action forum, many organizers choose to have groups fill out a summary form, which can be organized around the following categories:

1. Areas of agreement
2. Areas of disagreement
3. Areas where participants feel ambivalent or unsure
4. Unanswered questions or areas where participants feel they need more information
5. Action ideas (for individuals, small groups, and the community as a whole) and suggestions for changes in public policy
6. Community resources or assets

♦ Provide ongoing support for facilitators.

Well-trained facilitators are one of your strongest assets. Treat them with care! They make a huge volunteer contribution of time and talent, and indeed, can be the difference between success and failure.

Keep in mind the volunteer-management principles of training, support, and recognition. Find the best trainers you can, and offer well-planned training events. Evaluate the trainings and trainers to help them constantly adjust and improve. Support the facilitators with a hotline or mentor. Bring them together informally while the study circles are under way to check in and share advice and problem solving. Above all, thank them publicly for their contribution.

♦ Keep expanding the pool of facilitators.

As with any volunteers, people will cycle in and out, as circumstances change. To sustain your study circle program, new facilitators need to be identified, trained and supported on a continuing basis. Remember that each round of study circles can be a source of future facilitators. Provide opportunities for people to sign up to be trained, after they've finished taking part in a study circle.

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. What should we do when someone volunteers to facilitate who isn't well suited to the task? Keep in mind that facilitation is not for everyone. It is vital to the success of the program to have the right people in this role. It may be awkward, but you will have to convince people that there are many important ways to contribute to the program. Try to find out what their skills and talents are, and direct them accordingly.

2. Do the facilitators need to be experts in the issue area? No, the facilitator's specialty is the group process, not the content of the discussion. The important thing is to study the discussion materials ahead of time, and to know how one session moves to the next, so that full attention can be given to the process and to anticipating questions and points of view that may come out in the discussion. Sometimes, it's wise to include people in your training sessions who have expertise in particular issue areas (race relations, violence, education reform, immigration) to help facilitators gain a deeper understanding of the issue being addressed.

3. How do we make sure the facilitators are ready to handle difficult situations? Practice, practice, practice! During trainings, allow plenty of time for role-playing, and plan exercises that teach strategies for dealing with tensions or conflict in the study circle. Plan extra training sessions if the trainings do not allow enough time. Seek advice from professional trainers or mediators who know how to handle highly charged situations.

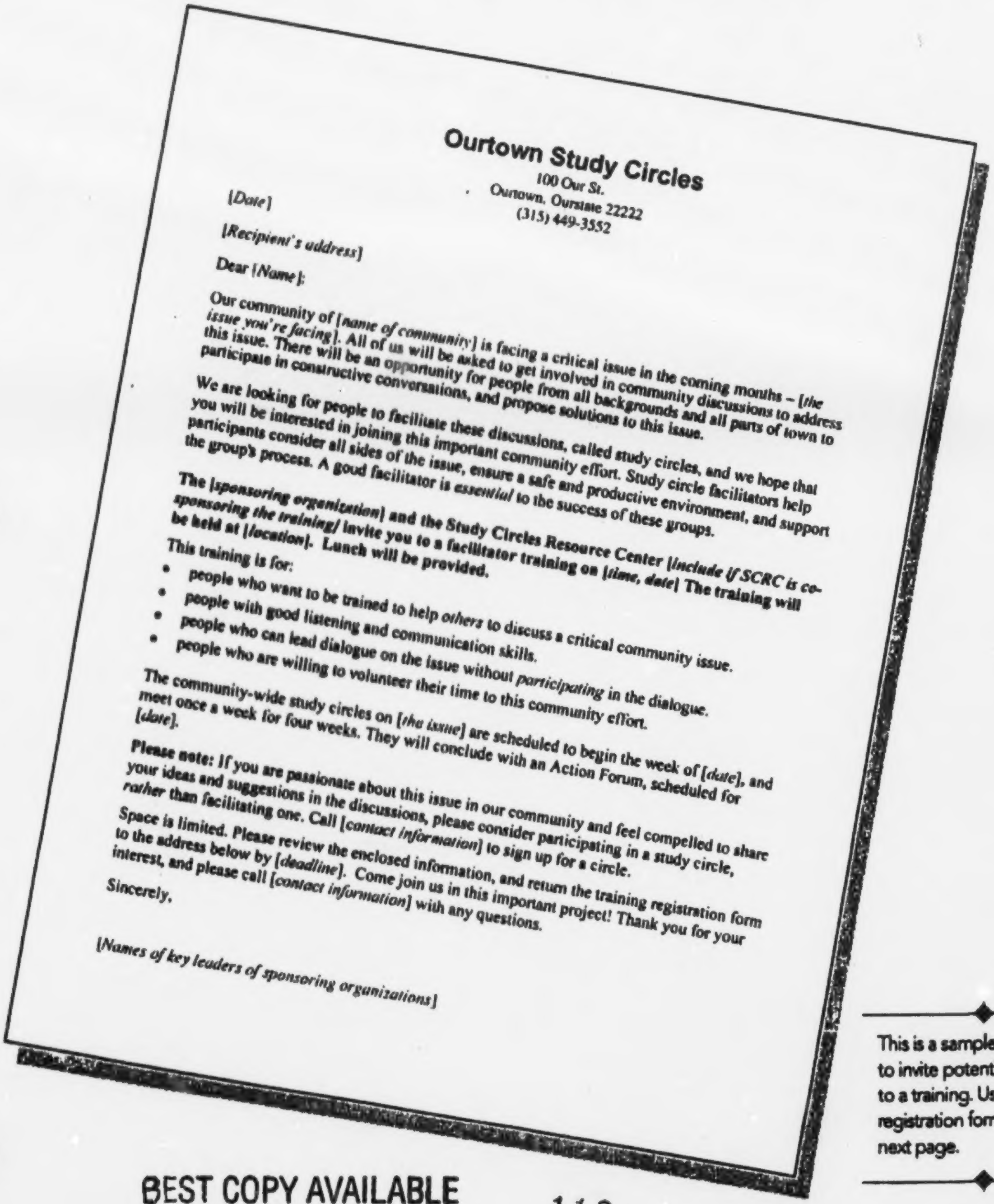
4. How do we measure how the facilitators are doing? Evaluation and feedback should be a mainstay of your program. In trainings and practice sessions, the trainer is responsible for giving feedback and helping to determine who is ready to be an effective facilitator. When the study circles get under way, co-facilitators give one another feedback, and participants use evaluation forms to comment on the quality of the facilitation. This helps ensure that facilitators continue to improve. (See forms in SCRC's *Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*).

5. Are there costs associated with this part of the program? Some trainers may volunteer their time to begin with, but it's best to plan to cover their expenses. In some programs, organizers contract with trainers to train new facilitators – *and* be "on call" to provide support, feedback and coaching throughout the program. Costs vary according to the number of facilitators and the number of rounds of circles within a given time frame.

6. Is it necessary for an experienced facilitator to go through the training? Yes. It is very important for facilitators to understand what a community-wide program is – and to know about the context in which the study circles will take place. It is also essential to know how facilitating a study circle differs from other group processes.

Step 5

Sample Document: Invitation to Potential Facilitators



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

[*Date*]

[*Recipient's address*]

Dear [*Name*]:

Our community of [*name of community*] is facing a critical issue in the coming months – [*the issue you're facing*]. All of us will be asked to get involved in community discussions to address this issue. There will be an opportunity for people from all backgrounds and all parts of town to participate in constructive conversations, and propose solutions to this issue.

We are looking for people to facilitate these discussions, called study circles, and we hope that you will be interested in joining this important community effort. Study circle facilitators help participants consider all sides of the issue, ensure a safe and productive environment, and support the group's process. A good facilitator is *essential* to the success of these groups.

The [*sponsoring organization*] and the Study Circles Resource Center [*include if SCRC is co-sponsoring the training*] invite you to a facilitator training on [*time, date*] The training will be held at [*location*]. Lunch will be provided.

This training is for:

- people who want to be trained to help *others* to discuss a critical community issue.
- people with good listening and communication skills.
- people who can lead dialogue on the issue without *participating* in the dialogue.
- people who are willing to volunteer their time to this community effort.

The community-wide study circles on [*the issue*] are scheduled to begin the week of [*date*], and meet once a week for four weeks. They will conclude with an Action Forum, scheduled for [*date*].

Please note: *If* you are passionate about this issue in our community and feel compelled to share your ideas and suggestions in the discussions, please consider participating in a study circle, *rather* than facilitating one. Call [*contact information*] to sign up for a circle.

Space is limited. Please review the enclosed information, and return the training registration form to the address below by [*deadline*]. Come join us in this important project! Thank you for your interest, and please call [*contact information*] with any questions.

Sincerely,

[*Names of key leaders of sponsoring organizations*]

◆

This is a sample of a letter to invite potential facilitators to a training. Use it with the registration form on the next page.

◆

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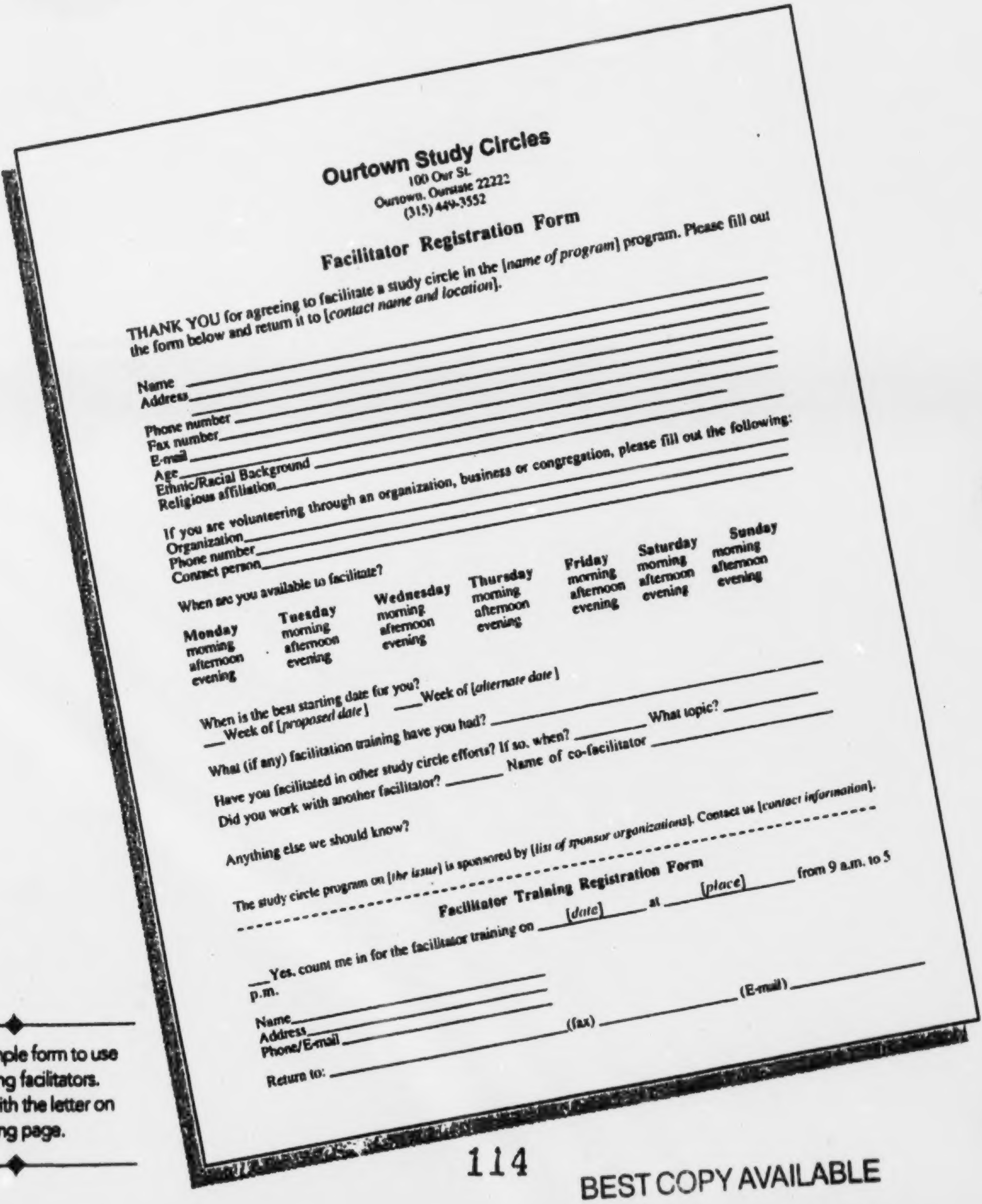
Sample Document: Form for Facilitator Registration



Ourtown Study Circles
100 Our St.
Ourtown, Ourstate 22222
(315) 449-3552

Facilitator Registration Form

THANK YOU for agreeing to facilitate a study circle in the [*name of program*] program. Please fill out the form below and return it to [*contact name and location*].

Name ____________________
Address ____________________

Phone number ____________________
Fax number ____________________
E-mail ____________________
Age ____________________
Ethnic/Racial Background ____________________
Religious affiliation ____________________

If you are volunteering through an organization, business or congregation, please fill out the following:
Organization ____________________
Phone number ____________________
Contact person ____________________

When are you available to facilitate?

Monday	**Tuesday**	**Wednesday**	**Thursday**	**Friday**	**Saturday**	**Sunday**
morning	morning	morning	morning	morning	morning	morning
afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon	afternoon
evening	evening	evening	evening	evening	evening	evening

When is the best starting date for you?
___Week of [*proposed date*] ___Week of [*alternate date*]

What (if any) facilitation training have you had? ____________________

Have you facilitated in other study circle efforts? If so, when? ________ What topic? ________

Did you work with another facilitator? ________ Name of co-facilitator ____________________

Anything else we should know?

The study circle program on [*the issue*] is sponsored by [*list of sponsor organizations*]. Contact us [*contact information*].

- -

Facilitator Training Registration Form

___Yes, count me in for the facilitator training on ___[*date*]___ at ___[*place*]___ from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Name ____________________
Address ____________________
Phone/E-mail ____________________ (fax) ____________________ (E-mail) ____________________

Return to: ____________________

This is a sample form to use for registering facilitators. Enclose it with the letter on the preceding page.

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Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Plan the Kickoff

Step 5

At the beginning of a round of study circles, a public kickoff event helps call attention to the program, builds enthusiasm, and drums up more participants. It marks the beginning of a widespread community dialogue that will lead to action and change.

You can galvanize a program by filling a room with all kinds of community people who care about an issue and who want to work with others to make a difference. Use the kickoff to show how broad your support is – public officials, leaders, and everyday people from all over the community.

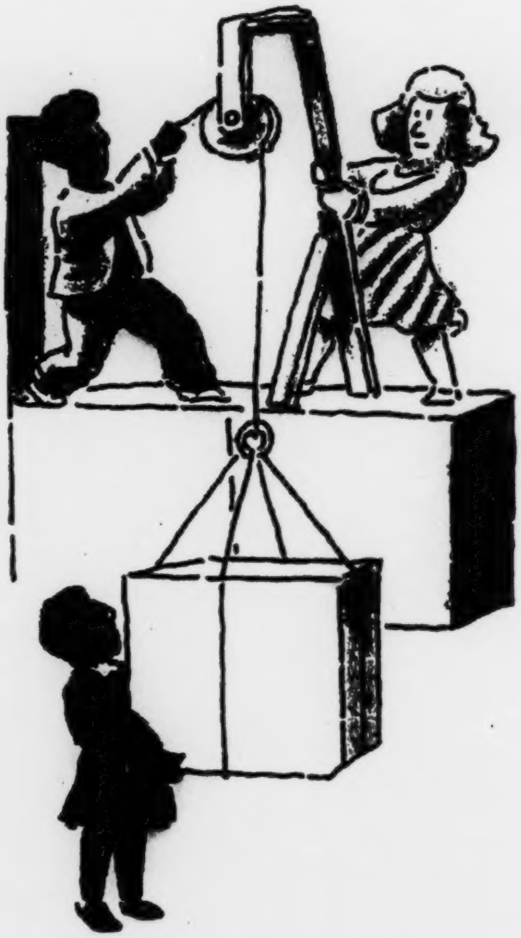
This is your chance to send a message that people don't have to be experts on the issue in order to take part, and to make it clear that all points of view are welcome. At its best, a kickoff shows people that study circles provide a way to play an active role in the community – to be part of something that is larger than themselves.

What to do

◆ Set a date.

◆ Plan the event.

◆ Promote the event.



An alternative – combining your kickoff with the first session

Sometimes, it makes sense to hold an event that *combines* the kickoff with the first session of study circles. If you decide to do this, you will need to intensify your publicity and up-front recruiting efforts so that you can be pretty sure of a good turnout. You will also need to shorten the kickoff program so that there will be plenty of time for people to go through the first session.

Depending on circumstances, you may decide to have people hold the rest of their sessions in locations all over town. You can reunite them at the action forum.

There are several advantages to this approach:

- It can simplify the task of creating diversity in the study circles. Post signs around the room with meeting dates on them, and ask people to choose a date that fits their schedule. Once they've sorted themselves out according to date, they can actually see whether there's enough diversity in their group (age, gender, race). If a group lacks diversity, ask for volunteers to pick another date, and adjust the membership of each group to make it more diverse. Ask people to make a point of joining a group where they don't know anybody so they can make new friends and hear new ideas.
- This method works well in small communities where people don't have to travel too far to get to a central place.
- Participants tend to get very energized after the first session. When they're all in the same place, you can capture that excitement and use it to bolster your program. Starting off together gives them a sense that they are part of something big. And by folding the first session into the kickoff, you reduce the number of commitments you are asking participants to make.

How to do it

◆ Set a date.

Choose a date that is fairly close to the beginning of the circles – a week to ten days beforehand. The goal is to focus the community's attention and draw more participants. Hold the kickoff at a central location and a convenient time of day for attendees and the media.

Step 5

◆ **Plan the event.**

- ⊃ Invite well-known community leaders to speak in favor of the program. The best testimonials come from people who have participated in pilot study circles.
- ⊃ Ask someone to explain what study circles are, and how this program will work – including timing, location of circles, and plans for the action forum.
- ⊃ Invite someone who has taken part in pilot study circles to talk about their experience.
- ⊃ Bring in a keynote speaker or a performer who can draw a large audience and inspire them to think about the issue and why their participation is important.
- ⊃ Demonstrate the process, and, if possible, give the audience a chance to break out into small groups and try it.
- ⊃ Allow time for questions and answers.
- ⊃ Invite people to sign up for the coming round of study circles. Make sure that the sign-up tables are clearly visible.
- ⊃ Provide food, and time for fun and socializing – before or after the event, or both!

◆ **Promote the event.**

- ⊃ Invite the media and help reporters to get the information they need.
- ⊃ Advertise the kickoff widely ahead of time. Try to create a sense of excitement and anticipation. Remember, you want the entire community to know that something really important is beginning – something that everyone will want to be part of.

A kickoff technique for large communities

Schedule a number of kickoff events to take place at the same time in different locations around the community. This can make it easier for people to attend, and can make the program more accessible to a wider diversity of participants.

Frequently Asked Questions – and Answers

1. How long should the kickoff be? A kickoff can be very effective without taking a lot of time – often one to two hours will be enough. Invite speakers who can be inspirational and enthusiastic, but ask them to keep their remarks brief. Try to include some time for sample study circles, so people can get a taste of the process. Allow time at the end for questions and answers, food, and socializing.

2. What time of day, and day of the week is best? The goal here is a good turnout – both from community members and the press. Some kickoffs are held on weekdays in the early morning or late afternoon, so that people can come before or after work. Some happen on Saturdays to have more time to include sample study circles. Check with the press to make sure what you are planning is compatible with their deadlines.

3. Will the kickoff generate most of our participants? No. You should be recruiting participants for several weeks leading up to the kickoff – through personal invitations, through organizations and coalition members, and through news coverage. The point of the kickoff is to increase awareness of the study circle program in the greater community, and bring even more people into the study circles.

Share the Work of Organizing Study Circles

Find Sites and Handle Logistics

Step 5

Any large-scale community-organizing effort is full of details – the things that seem to be insignificant, but often make the difference between a well-run program, and one marred by miscommunication, missteps, and mistakes! The key is to plan ahead, and think through all the steps along the way.

Often a coordinator needs a committee or a few detail-oriented volunteers to handle this part of the work. There's too much here for one person, so involve a small group to make sure things run smoothly.

What to do

- Consider the kinds of spaces you will need.
- Pick out sites for the study circles and think about scheduling.
- Make plans for child care, food, transportation, and other considerations.
- Set up a process to communicate about program details.

How to do it

◆ Consider the kinds of spaces you will need.

When planning where your circles will be located in the community, be sure to look for places that feel welcoming to everybody. If possible, identify a contact person at each site who will work with you.

Also consider this basic checklist:

- ➲ Is it well lighted?
- ➲ Is it easy to find?
- ➲ Is it served by public transportation?
- ➲ Is there ample parking?
- ➲ Are the rooms and seating comfortable?
- ➲ Are there public restrooms? Kitchen facilities?
- ➲ Is there a large building with many breakout rooms, such as a community college or large house of worship, where several groups could meet?
- ➲ Are the locations "friendly" to all kinds of people?
- ➲ Are there places with elevators or ramps for easy access?

◆ Pick out sites for the study circles and think about scheduling.

Site selection: Have your coalition members find locations for the study circles. Some possible kinds of locations include:

- ➲ Libraries
- ➲ Fire stations
- ➲ Schools
- ➲ Grange halls
- ➲ Community police buildings
- ➲ Large meeting rooms in corporate or government buildings
- ➲ Community colleges
- ➲ Neighborhood associations
- ➲ Laundromats
- ➲ Churches, synagogues, or mosques
- ➲ Social service agencies
- ➲ Bookstores

Scheduling: Ask people what will work for them, and use that as a basis for your scheduling.

- Offer a range of choices. To accommodate all kinds of people, you can schedule circles for different times of day, and different days of the week.
- Or, you might want to hold all the circles on the same day in one central location. Pick a day of the week that doesn't conflict with other regularly scheduled community events, and schedule your study circles for weekly meetings until they're finished. This is easier for the organizers because you only have to arrange one site. Be sure that it's a location that has plenty of parking and many breakout rooms.
- Consider the schedules of the young people who will be participating. What are their school and after-school commitments? What are their transportation needs?

◆ Make plans for child care, food, transportation, and other considerations.

- Will some groups require child care? Who will provide it?
- Can we provide transportation?
- Are study circles located in places served by public transportation? (This is a major concern if you are involving lots of young people in your program.)
- Do we need to make arrangements for hearing- or visually-impaired participants?

◆ Set up a process to communicate about program details.

It's important to have a system in place for facilitators and members of the organizing team to communicate with one another – making sure that people get the information they need to make the program run smoothly.

Answer these questions:

- How will we distribute the materials that facilitators need before the first session? (discussion guides, recording forms, newsprint, sample ground rules, step-by-step guidelines for each session, evaluation forms, general information on the program and its sponsors, and plans for an action forum)
- Do organizers and facilitators know whom to call if they have questions or problems?
- Do we need a process for sharing information quickly by telephone – a "phone tree"?
- Would e-mail be a good way to keep in touch?
- How will we handle notifying people about weather cancellations?
- Who is the key contact person to work with the media while the study circles are under way? Do facilitators know how to contact that person?

Frequently Asked Questions - and Answers

1. Is it better to have all the study circles in one location, or all over the community? This is something your whole team should discuss. Since your goal is to make it possible for people from all over the community to take part, you must decide how to make that happen. There are advantages to holding the study circles in one location – such as a community college that is easy to get to and offers convenient parking and good meeting space. It's less complicated than managing lots of sites, and it gives people a chance to see that they're part of a really big community effort. On the other hand, the location of the circles sends a message. It may be important for the study circles to take place in all kinds of neighborhoods, and different kinds of spaces. Some communities do both.

2. Should facilitators be responsible for finding their own sites, and handling refreshments and other details? No. A logistics committee or a few volunteers should take care of finding sites and speaking with hosts about other details. Facilitators already have a BIG job to do – managing the discussions and collecting the information.

3. Can the study circles happen in peoples' homes? Public spaces, such as libraries, schools, houses of worship, or community rooms, are preferable. Since these conversations are focused on public issues and community problem solving, public space seems more appropriate. And, since study circles usually bring people together who have never met before, a public space would probably offer more of a sense of "home territory" for everyone. (Of course, there are exceptions to this.) Think about your community as a whole, and try to find space that works for many different kinds of people.

4. Is it typical to have food at study circles? If so, who is responsible for providing it? Many study circles decide to have refreshments to create a welcoming atmosphere. If there's enough money in the budget to provide refreshments for the study circles, that's wonderful. It's also common for members of study circles to take turns bringing snacks. Pizza or snack food are a must for study circles with youth.

Hold a Round of Study Circles

Step 6

Now you are ready to launch the study circles! All the work of conceptualizing, planning and organizing is coming to a head. In fact, the most intense period of work probably happens four to six weeks *before* the circles actually begin. Your attention will be focused on recruiting participants, organizing publicity and outreach, arranging sites, and training facilitators.

At the same time, you will be preparing for the kickoff, getting the circles started, and thinking about the large-group meeting at the end – the action forum.

What to do

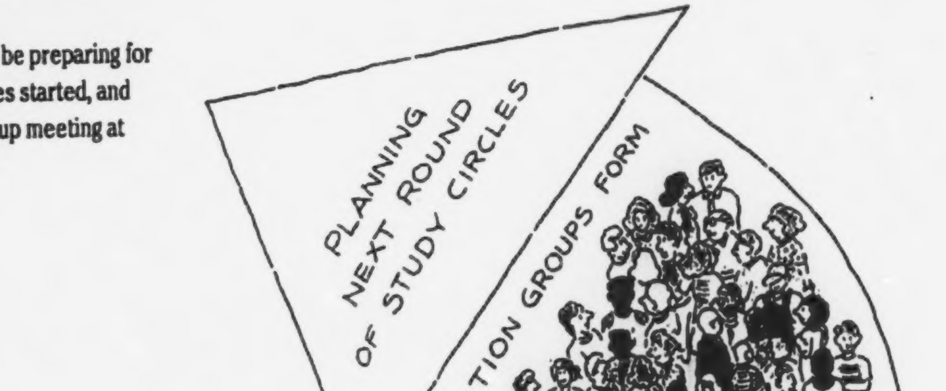
- Hold the kickoff.
- Conduct the study circles.
- Hold the action forum, and support and track action efforts.

◆

Last-minute checklist

Use this section as a reminder list in the days before the round of study circles begins, and as you support the round.

◆


PLANNING NEXT ROUND OF STUDY CIRCLES
ACTION GROUPS FORM
ACTION FORUM
STUDY CIRCLES HAPPEN
KICKOFF
FACILITATOR TRAINING
FORM COMMITTEES
PROGRAM PLANNING
COALITION BUILDING
3-6 MONTHS OR MORE
6-8 WEEKS

How to do it

◆ Hold the kickoff.

Approaching the kickoff

You've done your preliminary planning for the kickoff: set the date, planned the agenda, lined up speakers, booked the space. As the day approaches, there are a few last-minute things to check.

- Visit the site again, and check: sound system, any other audio-visual equipment, seating arrangements, arrangement for refreshments, etc.
- Remind your speakers what time they should arrive.
- Make sure you have some helpers to assist you with the details.
- Be prepared to sign up people at the kickoff who haven't yet been recruited into the study circles.
- *Call or fax a reminder to key members of the press you expect to attend.* Find out if they are interested in any particular interviews, or if there are other ways to assist them.

At the kickoff, the coordinator and members of the coalition should be available to answer any questions. The keynote and other speakers will set the tone, explain the community context for the study circles, and help build excitement and support for the program.

After the kickoff

Shortly after the kickoff, the study circles will begin – usually one to two weeks later. During this period, the coordinator and others will finalize the configuration of the circles, get discussion materials and other paper work to the facilitators, and handle any other last-minute logistical details. Participants will be added right up to the time the circles begin.

Remember!

Latecomers should form a new circle starting a week or two later, rather than joining one that is already under way. Those who come forward too late can be signed up for the next round.

♦ Conduct the study circles.

The study circles finally begin. Most will run in the same time period. Your aim is to have them all completed about a week or two before the action forum is scheduled.

NOTE: *It is very important to hold the action forum near the completion of the circles, to capitalize on the momentum and energy that has been created through the discussions.* If you wait several weeks or more, you will lose focus and participants. Don't delay!

While the study circles are going on, the coordinator is trouble-shooting any problems which arise. Be sure to stay in close touch with the facilitators, to see how things are going.

Here are some things to watch for:

- Make sure all study circles have discussion materials and other paper work.
- Be available to assist press coverage of the conversations.
- Be prepared for last-minute changes with child care, transportation, or other logistics.
- Keep an eye on the weather, in case you need to reschedule.
- Make sure the facilitators are supported. Have a trainer or mentor available for phone consultation. Or, better yet, bring the facilitators together part way through the study circles for an informal gathering, to check in and see how things are going.

See "Plan for Action, Including the Action Forum" on pages 89-98 for details.

◆ Hold the action forum, and support and track action efforts.

As the study circles end, organizers make final preparations for the action forum. In most situations, the action forum happens a few weeks after the last study circles end. This is a short period of time in which to gather the information from the circles (recording forms, newsprint, or whatever method has been used), and to analyze it.

Reviewing this information will help form a picture of each study circle, as well as the overall sense of the conversations. Any themes or trends that cut across the groups will emerge. This information will help you think about how to structure the action forum.

As the time approaches, the committee or volunteers in charge of the event will need to double-check their plans. Broad attendance is especially important, not only from the participants, facilitators and organizers, but from the larger community.

- Publicize the event widely.
- Remind facilitators and participants of the date and time.
- Issue personal invitations to key community leaders and representatives from organizations who are interested in the issue. These are the people who should be there to hear about the action ideas that the study circles have generated.

The action forum is a key point in the community-wide dialogue. It marks the conclusion of the conversations. It also provides an opportunity to blend the ideas and energy from the groups, and it signals the beginning of the action efforts that will be carried forward. *Be sure to encourage press coverage of this event.* And don't forget to recognize key volunteers, thank facilitators, congratulate participants – and celebrate!

Once the action forum is over and action groups have formed, support and track the action efforts. Make sure there are people and resources available to support the action groups as they move forward – with administrative help, assistance, research, access to decision makers – whatever it takes to help them achieve their goals. (For more on tracking action efforts, see page 95.)

Sustain Your Program and Expand the Impact of Your Work

Step 7

When a community begins to organize study circles, most of the energy goes into building the coalition and organizing the first round. Often, when organizers begin to see the powerful results of the process, they want to find ways to keep the study circle program going and growing.

Some organizers plan for future rounds to address the same issue they began with, to expand the impact they will make in that particular area; others begin to see study circles as a way to strengthen their community's capacity to address all kinds of interrelated community issues.

Finally, always be mindful of ways to link your program to other civic processes or community-building efforts. For example, in Decatur, Georgia, some city planning meetings (which often had been adversarial and not very participatory) have begun to adopt study circle principles. And in Springfield, Illinois, each round of study circles connects directly to the mayor's office, and sets priorities for city decisions.

Sustained study circle programs lead to...

- new and more diverse participation
- new leadership
- new connections
- new initiatives
- more sustained change

What to do

- Refer back to your initial program goals, and have a conversation about the future.
- Share ownership of the program.
- Support the coordinator.
- Make sure to communicate your successes to the larger community.
- Take care of yourselves and support one another.

Think ahead

Designate a small group of people to help you think about ways to sustain your study circle efforts.

Characteristics of effective, ongoing study circle programs

- The program is "owned" by a broad diversity of people and organizations.
- They have strong leadership at many levels.
- The program has an institutional home – a center for coordinating study circle activities.
- They keep the study circle idea alive between rounds – through newsletters, web sites, word of mouth, community presentations, and opportunities for sample study circles.
- They lead to visible results.
- Study circle processes begin to be connected to or applied in other kinds of public meetings.
- Study circles become incorporated in organizations throughout the community. For example, schools and workplaces begin to use study circles to address their internal issues, while continuing to play a part in the community-wide program.

How to do it

♦ Refer back to your initial program goals, and have a conversation about the future.

Assess what you have accomplished, and what you hope to achieve by sustaining study circles:

- ➲ What did we set out to achieve with study circles?
- ➲ What has the program accomplished? (Bring your evaluation committee into this conversation.)
- ➲ What other goals could we accomplish if we sustained the program? For example, who are the people we didn't reach in our first round that we could reach in a future round? What other kinds of problem solving could a sustained program achieve?
- ➲ What else is going on in the community that an ongoing study circle program could serve or connect to?
- ➲ What could be different in our community five years from now if we continued to organize study circles here?

♦ Share ownership of the program.

With each new round, reach out to new leaders and participants. An expanding and dynamic coalition makes room for new leadership. Shared ownership expands and diversifies participation, makes it possible to spread out the workload, and helps the program move more effectively to action and change. To achieve shared ownership of the program, keep communication strong among coalition members.

Even the best community efforts can be affected by so-called "turf" issues. But every successful program has treated this as an opportunity, not an obstacle. Look for ways to approach organizations you haven't worked with before because of mutual doubts or misperceptions. Invite them to sit down with you to discuss what you are each trying to achieve. Think together about how their work and the study circle process could complement one another.

◆ Support the coordinator.

Coordinating a study circle program is a demanding job, and burnout is a real possibility. Coalition members need to keep this in mind, and stay actively involved in whatever way they can. Make sure there is open and consistent communication between the coordinator and the coalition, so that ongoing expectations and needs are met. Remember that students and volunteers can help with administrative details.

◆ Make sure to communicate your successes to the larger community.

Keep the information flowing to the broader community about results and ongoing activities. Many programs publish a newsletter and/or maintain a web site to stay in touch with past participants and keep everyone in the community up-to-date on the study circles and the impact they're having on the community.

◆ Take care of yourselves and support one another.

Celebration, recognition, and time for rejuvenation are essential to sustaining your efforts.

Take time to celebrate what you have accomplished. Thank and recognize participants, facilitators, staff people, and coalition members. You might arrange for community leaders to give special commendations to facilitators. Some study circle programs issue certificates of participation to people who have completed a round of study circles. Special events – such as community picnics or diversity fairs – can combine celebration and recognition.

Think about what *you* need in order to keep going in the work, and ask others around you what they need. A wise person once said that sustained work requires the right "stops" as well as the right "steps." Consider having a retreat that includes both staff and volunteer organizers. People often benefit from a concentrated block of time for team building and for analyzing their progress and thinking about the future. Especially with ongoing community-building efforts, time off is important. Let key volunteers know that they can take a "break" from the project when they need one, and that they will be welcomed back to the work when they are ready.

Community events to help sustain the program

Celebrations

- ◆ ***Community or neighborhood picnics*** that give people a chance to celebrate their accomplishments
- ◆ ***Diversity fairs*** honoring different racial and ethnic cultures, and celebrating the ways in which study circles have led to new relationships and ways of working together
- ◆ ***Block parties*** following a neighborhood program that highlight program leaders and successes

Events to say thank you (to facilitators, organizers, sponsors, funders, and volunteers of all kinds)

- ◆ ***For example,*** in Syracuse, New York, free tickets to a performance of ***Raisin in the Sun*** were handed out to study circle facilitators.

Leadership styles for sustained programs

- ***Champions*** – formal and informal community leaders who speak out for the program and provide behind-the-scenes inspiration and support.
- ***Bridge builders*** – the coordinator(s) whose job it is to work well with the coalition and committees.
- ***Team players*** – working group and coalition members who collaborate effectively for the good of the program.
- ***Multipliers*** – trainers and facilitators who carry the message of the study circles throughout the community.
- ***New leaders*** – people who emerge from the study circles and take on new roles in the program and in the community.

When study circles become an ongoing part of the way a community solves its problems, citizens contribute actively to strengthening their communities. Across the country, people are using study circles to link dialogue and problem solving. The study circle movement is helping people find their public voice, and improve our public life.

Contact us at the Study Circles Resource Center. We will assist you, learn with you, and tell your story.

Organizing

Community-wide

Dialogue

for Action

and Change

Community Profiles
Decatur, Georgia

Recognizing a problem

By 1998, ongoing concerns about neighborhood issues and school district controversies were damaging community morale in Decatur. Racial tensions had marred school board elections. Tensions were growing between long-time residents and newcomers as rapidly rising property values and higher taxes threatened to displace old-timers, many of whom are people of color. And a zoning battle was raging over a parking deck built by a college in the middle of a residential neighborhood. In the midst of all this turmoil, the city began to revise its strategic plan and city leaders realized that they needed citizen input.

Searching for a solution

Long-time Decatur resident Jon Abercrombie, who runs a local nonprofit called Common Focus, was looking for a way to ensure that citizens from across the community would become actively involved in community problem solving and decision making. He saw study circles as a way to build significant, diverse citizen participation into the process of developing the city's strategic plan. To that end, he convinced a group of key leaders from all sectors of the community to help organize study circles so that Decatur residents could have a voice in resolving neighborhood issues, and contribute their thinking to plans for community growth and development.

Using community-wide study circles

Some 450 people took part in the Decatur Roundtables, with more than 20 percent of the participants being people of color. Organizers used a variety of recruiting strategies: A well-known black woman – one of two part-time staff people hired to coordinate the program – went door-to-door to promote the Roundtables. Her efforts helped establish study circles as a credible avenue to longer-term participation in the community's decision-making processes. To set a positive tone, recruiters carried a "leadership map" of the formal and informal associations in Decatur to presentations. It turned out to be a great way to bring people on board. The Roundtable discussions were based on a study circle guide developed by local organizers to address issues specific to Decatur neighborhoods, and growth and development.

Decatur at a glance

Population: 18,147 (64.7 percent European American/white; 30.3 percent people of color; 1.7 percent Latino/Hispanic. Source: *2000 U.S. Census*)

Study circle topic: Neighborhoods, Growth, and Development

History of the program: Began in 1998; held one round.

Number of participants: 450

Latest developments: In 2001, Decatur schools began laying the groundwork for Roundtables on education issues.

Decatur, Georgia

See the SCRC video ***Americans Finding Their Voices*** for more on the Decatur story.

Seeing results

The Roundtables were used as the basis of a subsequent citywide strategic planning process, ensuring that the ten-year plan included provisions for strengthening the civic life of the community in the years to come (active citizen engagement and community dialogue) – as well as economic development, traffic control, and architectural design. The plan attracted wide public input and support. Says Kecia Cunningham, Decatur city commissioner, "Roundtables have become part of our collective way of doing things in Decatur whenever a tough issue arises in the community."

In addition, City Hall created a new position for a neighborhoods' liaison who works directly with neighborhood associations. A group of participants formed the Decatur Greens – a new association of volunteers promoting green space and the ecological health of the community. Others worked on producing "Decatur 101," a one-night-a-week class to teach all interested citizens about how government works. And the Decatur Neighborhood Alliance was created to get different parts of Decatur working together.

Key to success

From the beginning, the City Commission gave the effort formal support – in the form of a vote of confidence, a promise that the commission would take seriously the work of Decatur citizens, and a grant to match money donated by a local foundation.

In addition, specific, skilled recruitment of African-American participants led to a different kind of experience for the city; for many, it was the very first time they ever discussed race relations in a diverse group. Other key factors: seed money from a local foundation; a broad-based coalition, including local leadership with wide-ranging networks of personal relationships and contacts; support of respected African-American leaders; and last, but not least, timing. After two years of conflict, the atmosphere was right for city government and the community at large to listen to one another and to act.

Community Profiles
Fayetteville, North Carolina

Recognizing a problem

In 1995, soldiers who were described as "skinheads" killed two African American soldiers from Ft. Bragg Army Base. The next year, four black police officers said they were dismissed from their jobs because they had raised issues of discrimination within the police department; they filed formal complaints with the city. These events signaled the need to overcome the community's seeming reluctance to address race-related issues.

Searching for a solution

Community leaders decided to act together. Moving to address issues of race in a new way, the city manager of Fayetteville brought together the African American president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People and the white president of the Chamber of Commerce, who had never met one another before, for an initial dialogue. As a result of that dialogue, they invited other community leaders to join with them to form a new group called Fayetteville United, with the specific purpose of finding ways to improve race relations within the community.

Using community-wide study circles

Fayetteville United began assembling a strong, racially diverse coalition: leaders with vision, resources and connections, administrative savvy, and marketing and promotion skills. Key to their success was the racial diversity of the members of FU, which worked to bridge the real and perceived gap between the white and black leadership in the community. Fayetteville United joined with the Human Relations Commission to create an organizing group and began organizing study circles on race relations. Following pilot study circles in 1998, a public kickoff attracted 300 people and led to the formation of 15 circles. At a study circle action summit in June 1999, at least 35 participants signed up to serve on five action teams.

Fayetteville at a glance

Population: 121,015 (46.6 percent European American/white; 41.9 percent African-American/black; 5.7 percent Latino/Hispanic. Source: 2000 U.S. Census)

Study Circle Topic: Race Relations, Youth, Community-Police Relations

History of the program: Began in 1998 – held two community-wide rounds, one round with youth in the community, and one round with youth in the schools.

Number of Participants: 300

Latest developments: In 2001, Fayetteville launched community-wide study circles on police-community relations.

Fayetteville, North Carolina

Seeing results

The 1999 round of study circles gave people the opportunity to begin talking openly about race in a way that had not been possible before. Many people reported important personal changes in attitude, and developed new friendships across racial lines. Organizers held additional study circles within the faith community and a round of study circles for youth, all of which focused on race relations. They launched a second round of study circles for youth in the schools in fall 2000. Continuing to build relations between the community and law enforcement – an initiative that grew out of the first community round of study circles on race – the Human Relations Commission in spring 2001 organized a new program on community-police relations, which won broad support in the community. Law enforcement agencies and city officials committed in advance to participating in the program and implementing action ideas that came from the circles.

Key to success

The diverse group of leaders at the heart of the study circle effort in Fayetteville shared a belief that the time was right and something needed to be done to move their city forward as a place that honored diversity and worked for equity. That sense of mutual commitment gave energy to the effort and acted as a powerful attraction to those recruited to assist with it. A record of tangible results from study circle programs has made the study circle process a credible way of public problem solving in Fayetteville.

Community Profiles
Guilderland, New York

Recognizing a problem

The zoning board of Guilderland, New York, was tired of being criticized. The citizen activists who raised a fuss at every one of the board's meetings were tired of complaining. Every new land-use issue or zoning decision generated complaints. Then, in 1998, the proposed expansion of a shopping mall brought cries of, "too much traffic," and, "save the environment."

Searching for a solution

In the face of these mounting tensions, the town zoning board declared a six-month building moratorium, and decided to create Guilderland's first new comprehensive plan since 1969. The next step was to appoint a Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board – a method land-use commissions often employ to get input for their decisions, and to help discourage any opposition. For public input, the town was going to rely on traditional mail-in surveys, one-evening, neighborhood fact-finding sessions, and stand-at-the-mike public hearings.

Meanwhile, members of the zoning board and some citizen activists realized that something more was needed. They decided to find a way to involve a much larger number of citizens in the process of developing the comprehensive plan. Long-time resident Liesse Mohr was looking for a process that would reduce antagonism, build trust, and ensure that suggestions for the comprehensive plan would develop from the "bottom up." She proposed that they use study circles, and volunteered her time to coordinate the program, which was sanctioned by the advisory board.

Using community-wide study circles

Fifteen members of the Comprehensive Plan Advisory Board formed a coalition to provide advice on all aspects of shaping the program. The town government and the Guilderland schools provided in-kind assistance, including meeting space, and helped to open doors and get the support of other town entities. Organizers chose SCRC's *Smart Talk for Growing Communities* as a framework for the circles.Thirty-five facilitators, including many who had prior experience in small-group facilitation, attended a training led by SCRC, and ninety-six participants signed up for a total of eight study circles.

Guilderland at a glance

Population: 32,688 (90.9 percent European American/white; 2.4 percent African American/black; 1.8 percent Latino/Hispanic; 3.8 percent Asian. Source: 2000 U.S. Census)

Study Circle Topic: Growth

History: Began in 1998, have held one community-wide round.

Number of Participants: 96

Latest developments: An all-volunteer, nonprofit organization provides ongoing support for citizen engagement as issues arise in the community.

Guilderland, New York

Seeing results

The new comprehensive plan prepared by the zoning board relied heavily on a report generated by the study circles, which retained much of the flavor of the study circle discussions, as well as specific recommendations.

And participants have moved forward with other action ideas. Organizers applied for and secured 501(c)(3) nonprofit status for Guilderland Study Circles. As a financially independent community institution, it will be able to outlive changes in administrations, while continuing to assist local government and create its own initiatives based on input from townspeople.

A study circle discussion guide is being developed to help neighborhoods define their unique characteristics – an essential step in preparing neighborhoods to meet New York State requirements relating to zoning changes. A web site is being designed; in the meantime, information about the program is available at studycircles@aol.com.

Key to success

Organizers took great care to ensure that each circle had geographic diversity, including people from three different zones in the town. In addition, volunteers put a great deal of effort into training study circle recorders, gathering records, and combining them into a report for the community. According to Mohr, the report "appealed to people across the political spectrum because it used the exact words of the participants who were Guilderland residents representing all parts of the community. It was believable, and they bought into it."

Community Profiles
Inglewood, California

Recognizing a problem

Rapidly shifting demographics were intensifying challenges in the Inglewood Unified School District. Morale was low. Relationships between the schools and the community were unraveling, and lack of resources, families under stress, and tensions between African-Americans and Hispanics were contributing factors. Superintendent McKinley Nash knew he needed to adopt proactive strategies to deal with change and build morale.

Searching for a solution

Nash wanted to do something to engage parents and other community members. He first considered using study circles to focus on race relations, but eventually decided that *education* was the issue that had greatest appeal for the parents of children in the Inglewood schools, whatever their racial or ethnic background. Study circles, he reasoned, would help carry out key components of the school district's strategic plan regarding parental involvement, revenue enhancement, community education, and after-school programs.

Using community-wide study circles

The study circle program in Inglewood unfolded like a well-run campaign. Dr. Nash mandated that the 20 schools in his district organize at least one circle apiece. Each school implemented a study circle program as part of its own strategic plan, designing the program to fit the school's particular needs and circumstances. Three representatives from each school served on the "Committee of '97" – the central planning group for the district-wide effort.

Dr. Nash asked the school principals to go through the facilitator training – both to assist the program and to strengthen their listening skills. The school "liaisons" also took part in the facilitator training, and teachers in every school were asked to help recruit participants. Organizers used Spanish and English to promote the circles and provided discussion guides in both languages. Participants in the 1997-98 round numbered 600.

Inglewood at a glance

Population: 112,580 (4.1 percent European American/white; 46.4 percent African-American/black; 46 percent Latino/Hispanic. Source: *2000 U.S. Census*)

Study Circle Topics: Education, Conflict Resolution

History: Began in 1996, have held one round on education; continuing informally in some of the schools.

Number of Participants: 700

Latest developments: In 2000, the school district launched study circles on conflict resolution.

Inglewood, California

Seeing results

Relationships among parents improved right away. "Before, there was not much interaction between Hispanic and African-American parents," said Sophia Dossman, one of the community liaisons. "The study circles process, and the cultural sharing that happened during the process at my school, helped form more positive relationships." Parental involvement in PTA meetings and various volunteer projects increased accordingly.

The schools also responded to parents' suggestions for immediate improvements, such as assistance for overworked principals and the creation of more after-school programs and community activities. In addition, communication between the schools and the district administration improved.

Building on the positive energy and momentum generated by the study circles, Dr. Nash involved many parents in a campaign to pass a bond measure that would make $131 million available for school facilities improvements (Measure K). The level of interest was high because the study circles had helped people reconnect to the schools, and gain a much better understanding of the issues. Measure K passed resoundingly, with 88 percent in favor.

Before his untimely death in the summer of 1999, Dr. Nash expressed a hope that study circles on conflict resolution could take place in the Inglewood Unified School District. That round began during the spring months of 2000.

Key to success

The commitment and leadership of the Inglewood Unified School District were key factors in the success of this program. From the beginning, organizers built a direct, explicit link between the dialogue and action in support of both short-term and long-term goals. And by structuring the program in such a way that each school had organizing responsibilities "locally" and at the district level, they made it clear that the study circles could effect change at all levels of the education system.

Community Profiles

Springfield, Illinois

Recognizing a problem

The history of Springfield, Illinois, includes not only the great legacy of Abraham Lincoln, who pleaded many cases there before the Illinois Supreme Court, but also the after effects of a violent race riot that took place in 1908. Concerned about the rising number of race-based conflicts – both local and national – Mayor Karen Hasara decided, in 1997, that it was time for Springfield residents to take a hard look at their history and how poor race relations had continued to affect the well-being of the community.

Searching for a solution

Looking for something that had the potential for lasting and systemic change, the mayor asked the city's Community Relations Commission to find out what other communities were doing to address the underlying causes of racial discord. She made it clear that her goal was to foster and maintain ongoing racial harmony, as well as to address immediate problems. On the advice of a local citizen, the mayor decided to try study circles.

Using community-wide study circles

The City of Springfield served as the sole sponsor for the first two rounds of study circles, with Mayor Hasara and Community Relations Commission Director Sandy Robinson doing the planning and organizing. They invited representatives from almost 300 community organizations and groups to take part in pilot study circles and be trained as facilitators. Skeptics who questioned the mayor's commitment to really doing something about the race issue were won over by the process. Most of them became cheerleaders for the program, which has been ongoing since 1998.

In addition, organizers have been deliberate and skillful in connecting the study circle program to the historic context of the city. They stage big events – kickoffs and action forums – in places like the Statehouse where Lincoln gave his "house divided" speech, and schedule them to coincide with important dates in the city's history.

Springfield at a glance

Population: 111,454 (80.3 percent European American/white; 15.3 percent African-American/black; 1.2 percent Latino/Hispanic. Source: *2000 U.S. Census*)

Study Circle Topic: Race Relations

History: Began in 1998; by spring 2001, 4 rounds were completed, plus one round with youth.

Number of Participants: 600

Springfield, Illinois

Seeing results

Many of the recommendations from the 1998 study circles have been carried out, including establishing new bus routes to the east side of town and creating a calendar of multicultural community events.

In the fall of 1999, the mayor appointed a diverse group of twelve leaders to serve on a Race Relations Task Force. Most of these leaders are study circle veterans who signed on because they want to accelerate the pace of institutional and civic change. As a group they will work to develop new leadership in the community, encouraging study circle participants to sign up for subcommittees of the task force so they can pursue their interest in action ideas relating to education, government, economic development, and other areas. In addition, this group acts as a rapid response team to help the community respond constructively to hate crimes. The task force also is sharing responsibility for expanding the study circles.

Key to Success

Mayor Hasara's up-front commitment to follow through on action ideas generated in the study circles set the tone for this program. Says Robinson, "We have a mayor willing to step forward and put a seal of approval on the process at every turn. That way, we're able to get buy-in from the other departments." At the same time, study circle organizers in Springfield have learned that relying on the mayor's courageous leadership is not enough. They are working hard to make it clear that the study circle program is "owned" by the entire community, not just the city.

From the outset, the program's diverse leadership has sent the message to the community that "study circles are for everyone." And as organizing responsibility has shifted from the city to the Race Relations Task Force, the commitment to diversity has held. The organizers' hands-on approach to recruitment enhances the credibility and visibility of the effort and has been a big factor in bringing diversity into the circles. Thirty percent of the participants in the early study circle rounds were people of color.

This program puts particular emphasis on facilitator training, and the budget includes funding for a diverse team of four facilitator trainers who have special expertise in race relations and diversity issues. Trainings include opportunities to develop and improve facilitation skills related to the topic of race, and trainers are on call throughout each round of study circles to coach facilitators, troubleshoot, and provide support.

4

APPENDICES, RESOURCES, AND INDEX

Organizing
Community-wide
Dialogue
for Action
and Change

Appendix A
Involving Public Officials in Your Program

As you think about coalition membership, consider public officials, both elected and appointed. When citizens and officials work together in study circle programs, a new kind of partnership can be created – one with greater capacity for decision making and problem solving. Public officials can:

- raise the program's visibility and credibility.
- expand recruitment of participants and sponsoring organizations.
- provide unique insights into important public policy questions.
- help participants take action on the issues they face.
- channel insights of participants into government policy decisions.
- strengthen people's sense that their participation in politics can make a difference.

Benefits to public officials

If you are a public official, you may be asking whether it is worth your taking the time – and perhaps expending valuable political resources – to participate in a study circle program. Other public officials who have taken part in study circles report that they benefit in the following ways:

Reaching out beyond core constituencies

Study circles provide officeholders with opportunities to talk with diverse groups of citizens who care deeply about issues, but who are not locked into advocacy positions. Study circles create a non-hostile environment in which public officials can reach out and meet with people who may fall outside of their core constituencies.

Getting to the essence of public views

Study circles encourage citizens to discuss their personal connections to complex public issues. Participants typically explore the essence of their values, concerns, and aspirations regarding public challenges. Information of this sort is invaluable when it comes time for public officials to make difficult policy decisions on a wide range of issues.

What do we mean by "public officials"?

When people think of public officials, they often name only their most visible elected representatives – mayors, city councilpersons, county and state legislators, school board members, etc. But public officials also include a wide variety of other elected and appointed officeholders, such as police chiefs, school superintendents, city and county planners, human service agencies, and many others. Depending on the issue you are addressing, and your program goals, any number of public officials may be interested in being part of your study circle program.

Things to consider if you are a public official

- Sort out your expectations of the study circles process, and make sure that you articulate them. Be clear about how you, the government, and your constituents will benefit from the process.
- Do not try to organize the study circle program by yourself. If the study circle program is to be embraced by the entire community, it is essential that it be "co-owned" and administered by a broad-based community coalition.
- Be clear with yourselves and others about your role in the program. For example, it is not a good idea for you to assume responsibility for implementing all of the action ideas that will emerge from the circles. If citizens aren't given a role in making change happen, the civic energy created by the study circles will quickly dissipate. Another common mistake officeholders make is allowing citizens to put them in the "all-knowing expert" role. When this happens, public officials can miss out on the chance to carefully listen to the experiences, concerns, aspirations, and wisdom of citizens.

Supporting the search for nongovernmental solutions

Study circle participants are making a serious effort to understand and resolve public issues for themselves. These people believe that government action alone cannot solve all of society's problems. Through face-to-face dialogue, public officials can help study circle participants to think more broadly about the nature of the challenges that confront their communities and the nation, and also help them sort through the pros and cons of different courses of action.

Recognizing active and engaged citizens

Officeholders and good government advocates frequently worry about steadily decreasing rates of voter turnout. Public officials can demonstrate their dedication to creating a more informed and engaged citizenry by meeting with study circle participants who carve time from busy schedules to examine, discuss, and take action on our country's most difficult public challenges.

Building stronger relationships

Study circles provide an opportunity for public officials to reach out and form stronger relationships with their constituents. Citizen participants greatly appreciate the opportunity to meet in settings that are not about campaign-style selling of predetermined policy positions, or about damage control techniques common to most public meetings. The trust that is built in these meetings gives officeholders greater credibility when other difficult issues arise.

Roles for public officials

You may be one of several citizens who are trying to organize an effective study circle program. Or, you may be a public official who is trying to decide whether to either initiate or join a study circle program. In either instance, it is very important that you think about the role that public officials should play in the study circles. Two of the most common roles for officeholders are:

Help with organizing

Mayors, city council members, state and local superintendents of schools, human relations commissioners, planning and zoning commissioners, members of Congress, and others have all played roles in helping to organize study circle programs. In many instances, public officials are the primary convening institution for the study circle program, and provide the staff and support to organize it. In others, they play an active, supporting role – through offering public spaces for meetings, access to office space, telephones, computers, and copy machines. They sometimes offer funding or staffing for the program. Public officials often use their good standing to invite citizens and other officeholders to participate in the study circles.

Face-to-face dialogue with study circle participants

The single most powerful thing public officials can do to strengthen a study circle program is to have a candid, face-to-face dialogue with participants. Some may be very comfortable with the give-and-take style of study circles. Others, though, may be wary of new formats that differ from the typical public hearing, town meeting, or focus group. The following talking points may be helpful to public officials who are considering joining the study circles:

- *This is not a special-interest project.* Study circles do not promote any particular partisan viewpoint or special interest position. Citizens participate because study circles allow people to explore different points of view without pushing participants in a particular direction.
- *How much time will it take?* The time commitment for public officials can be as little as a single one-hour meeting or a longer sequence of study circles over a period of weeks.

Things to consider if you are a citizen organizer/coordinator

- Be clear about your sense of how involving public officials will help you meet your program goals.
- Offer public officials a range of ways they can get involved in the study circle program. Don't make it a "we need you to do this or nothing" situation. Many officeholders may, especially at first, only want to get involved in minimal ways. Use this as an opportunity for them to learn more about the process and to gain respect for your work.
- Do your homework. Do your best to find out what issues are of concern to the officeholders. Try to anticipate the questions they may ask you, especially regarding the variety of possible roles you present to them.

- ***How many citizens will be involved?*** This will vary from program to program. But no matter what the size of the meeting, the study circle process will create opportunities for more meaningful dialogue than is found in most other types of public meetings.
- ***How are participants recruited?*** Every effort is made to recruit a cross section of the community. This is done by creating a diverse coalition of organizations such as civic associations, clergy associations, schools, businesses and other employers who, in turn, reach out to people they see daily.
- ***Will the news media be involved?*** Some public officials may want the publicity that comes with the news media's presence. Others may prefer to downplay the role of the news media in order to create more opportunities for frank conversation. The news media should be invited only if everyone agrees. Moreover, comments made during the meeting between study circle participants and officeholders should be "off the record."
- ***No surprises.*** Offer to brief public officials beforehand on the main themes that study circle participants have been discussing regarding their concerns, aspirations, and action plans. Emphasize that the meeting will be a structured one, with a trained facilitator and ground rules. Make sure officeholders understand that this will not be a free-for-all.

Appendix B
Involving Young People in Your Program

Most public issues – from crime to race relations to education reform – directly involve and affect young people. Don't overlook them as you plan your study circles. Adding young people to the conversation will change it, and create new kinds of relationships and solutions. Youth are especially important in study circles on education and youth development.

To recruit they into the circles, it is *essential* that young people be part of the organizing coalition. Try to involve them in every aspect of the effort – planning, organizing, facilitating, and participating.

Tips for involving young people in study circles:

- Spend some focused time with young people talking about the issue. How do they see it? What aspects seem most important to them? How would they like things to change?
- Go where young people are to invite them into the program. Visit schools, community clubs, and places of worship.
- Ask the young organizers and facilitators to help recruit others to join; and get their advice about the best ways to reach other youth.
- Ask teachers or school administrators to offer extra credit or other incentives for youth who get involved in community programs.
- Think about creative ways to partner with schools, clubs, congregations or other organizations that serve youth.
- Plan meetings and circles around school, sports, and work schedules. Ask young participants what times work for them.
- Look for convenient study circle sites that can be reached on foot, or with public transportation.
- Keep the youth perspective in mind as you invite people to join. Listen to how young people talk about the issue, and incorporate their language into the overall project description.
- Make sure there is always time for fun and food!

What do we mean by "young people"?

"Young people" refers primarily to high school and college-age people. Some programs, however, have involved sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-graders.

Check out the SCRC discussion guide ***Youth Issues, Youth Voices*** for more ideas on organizing with young people.

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Young people as study circle facilitators

Many young people are especially effective as study circle facilitators. Young facilitators are powerful symbols of youth as leaders, and in this role, are learning and modeling collaborative, respectful, and democratic leadership.

Look for young people with good listening skills to be trained as facilitators. Think beyond the usual leaders. Plan to pair them with an adult co-facilitator, who can serve as a mentor and backup. Mix young people and adults in facilitation trainings, and save some time for the pairs to get to know one another, and decide how they are going to work together. (See *A Guide for Training Study Circle Facilitators*, available from SCRC.)

Alert facilitators to the special dynamics of intergenerational groups, so that the youth have an equal voice. Don't let the adults dominate. Decide what proportion of each study circle you want to be young people, and factor that into your recruitment plans.

Appendix C
Involving the Media in Your Program

Some of the most innovative and successful programs in the country are those that include a media partner among the coalition members. The media can play a large role in bringing a study circle effort to life and helping it grow and deepen in a community.

Media can:

- increase the program's visibility and credibility.
- boost recruitment of participants and sponsoring organizations.
- raise awareness and understanding of the issue being addressed.
- support and help sustain community action on the issue.
- advise on media relations.
- provide support for graphics, printing or video production.

Benefits to media

Why would the media want to participate in a study circle program? Here are some reasons reported by these partners in programs around the country:

- **To connect with readers, listeners or viewers**
  Reporting on study circles allows journalists to connect with readers, viewers or listeners in meaningful and relevant ways. The *Maine Sunday Telegram* in Portland, Maine, wrote the discussion material for the state's Reader Roundtable on education reform. The paper published the sessions on four consecutive Sundays to correspond with the study circles.
- **To play a role in public life**
  Many media outlets today believe that journalism has an obligation to public life. They are looking for innovative ways to interact with and empower their communities. In Utica, New York, the *Observer Dispatch* helped study circle participants connect to action by publishing an entire series of articles on action opportunities that pertained to the issue.

What do we mean by "media"?

Newspapers and radio and TV stations are the most prominent media. You may have several types of each in your community. If the major state or regional daily paper is not located in your city, a bureau may be. Think, too, of suburban, neighborhood, or ethnic-language papers, which may be published weekly. In addition to commercial, mainstream TV and radio stations, consider public stations, which are committed to public service and may be natural partners for study circle programs. Community-access channels and local cable companies are playing roles in programs. Don't forget ethnic-language TV and radio stations, which may be among the larger media players in your area.

- **To build relationships with the community**
  Like most successful businesses, smart media organizations look for ways to be contributing community partners. Diverse study circle coalitions are a logical forum to meet this goal. The *News Journal* in Wilmington, Delaware, created a logo for the New Castle County study circle program and donated space for announcements of trainings, kickoffs, action forums, and other public gatherings.
- **To make a difference in the community**
  Media increasingly is realizing its responsibility to the community. Media partners can help a study circle program meet its action and change goals. Maine Public Television produced a television show after the state's Acts Against Violence study circles to highlight action efforts initiated by participants. A moderator interviewed representatives from ten circles about their projects.

Roles for media partners

- **Newspapers** - The most common media partner in a study circle program is a newspaper. Once a publisher or editor is on board, there are many ways newspapers can be involved, including news coverage, commentary, editorials, op-eds, and public service listings. Some newspapers publish special sections highlighting the issue being discussed. Newspapers sometimes can provide printing at no cost or for a small fee.
- **Television** - Partnering with a local television station can greatly enhance the power and reach of the study circle program through news coverage, public service announcements, editorials, public affairs programming with viewer call-ins, and documentaries.
- **Radio** - Stations have supported programs in their public affairs, call-ins, and public service spots. These programs have helped recruit participants, aired the deliberations, connected policy makers to citizens with call-in programs, and reported on outcomes of the study circles.

Tips for recruiting a media partner:

- Do some homework first to determine which media outlets would make the best partners. The most common partner in a study circle program is a newspaper.
- Remember to include community-access and local cable companies in your research. These media organizations usually regard community news as the core of their mission, and are eager to get involved.
- Find out how the media organization has approached other broad community issues. Does there seem to be a commitment to community service and involvement? Do public officials or celebrities dominate news coverage, or does it feature the voices of citizens?
- Analyze editorials carefully. Do they represent a broad range of views, or do they tend to take one side of an issue?
- What kinds of op-ed pieces does the newspaper publish – syndicated writers or local residents?
- How much air time do radio and television stations devote to locally produced programming? What are typical themes?
- Find out which segments of the community each radio station targets.
- Once you've identified prospective partners, find key decision makers in the organization and use the information you've gathered to determine how best to approach them.
- Try to tie your partnership to the news part of the organization (such as publisher, or managing editor) rather than community outreach, public relations, marketing or advertising. Generally, those partnerships are stronger – but not always.

Best Practices in Organizing Community-wide Study Circles

Roberts, Rona; Kristin Houlé; Steve Kay; Biren "Ratnesh" Nagda; and Vivian Elliott. ***What Works: Study Circles in the Real World.*** Roberts & Kay, Inc.: 2000.

This report is designed specifically for study circle organizers, and is based on a two-year study of best practices in community-wide study circle programs. The study was supported and funded by the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation and commissioned by the Topsfield Foundation. The report contains suggestions on coalition building, recruiting and training facilitators, recruiting participants who reflect the community's diversity, and linking dialogue with action. It also contains a section on contributing to change (particularly in the area of race), and examples throughout of promising practices from study circle programs. 68 pages. Available from SCRC.

Evaluation

Kirkpatrick, Donald L. ***Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels.*** Berrett-Koehler: 1998.

The book includes tools, techniques, and case studies, which will help trainers and add rigor and discipline to training work.

Szanton, Peter. ***Evaluation and the Nonprofit Board.*** National Center for Nonprofit Boards: 1998.

In this booklet, board members will learn the importance of organizational assessment, when and how to evaluate, and some key questions to ask during the process.

Fund Raising

George, G. Worth. ***Fearless Fund-Raising for Nonprofit Boards.*** National Center for Nonprofit Boards: 1996.

Written for board chairs, development-committee heads, chief executives, or other board members interested in increasing board involvement in fund raising, this booklet suggests ways to motivate and involve board members, and lists a wide variety of fund-raising activities.

Keegan, P. Burke. ***Fund Raising for Non-profits.*** HarperCollins: 1994.

A guide that shows nonprofit organizations how to raise funds more effectively by working with their communities.

Mutz, John, and Katherine Murray. ***Fund Raising for Dummies.*** Hungry Minds, Inc.: 2000.

This is a complete guide to the art and science of raising money for nonprofit endeavors, from Little League to big foundations. The guide includes tips on how to write grants, how to conduct effective grass-roots campaigns, phone and mail solicitations, events, and more.

Media Relations

Bonk, Kathleen, and Henry Griggs. *The Jossey-Bass Guide to Strategic Communications for Nonprofits: A Step-By-Step Guide to Working With Media – Generate Publicity, Enhance Fun.* Jossey-Bass: 1999.

Complete with charts, checklists, and templates, this guide shows readers how to select the right media, identify target audiences, develop messages, and produce printed materials.

League of Women Voters. *Guide to Getting Good Media Coverage.*
www.lwv.org/elibrary/pub/ggmc_1.html

This web site offers a comprehensive how-to guide for writing press releases, letters to the editor, speeches, creating press kits, and more, to help you publicize events and programs.

Public Relations Society of America. *Tips and Tactics: Making Media Relations Work for You.* PRSA: 1995. Cost: $2.50

Contact: PRSA, 33 Irving Place, New York, NY, 10003-2376, Tel: 212-460-1459

This is a handy booklet for anyone who wants to learn the basics of media relations.

Salzman, Jason. *Making the News: A Guide for Nonprofits and Activists.* Westview Press: 1998.

A step-by-step guide that teaches readers through examples and samples of media work.

Wilcox, Dennis L., and Lawrence W. Nolte. *Public Relations Writing and Media Techniques.* Longman, Addison, Welsey: 1996.

In addition to explaining major public relations theories and concepts, this book provides basic guidelines, checklists, and how-to advice, as well as up-to-date examples of media practices.

Meeting Facilitation

Anand, Rohini, Ph.D. *Teaching Skills and Cultural Competency: A Guide for Trainers* (3rd Edition). National Multicultural Institute: 1999.

This detailed manual provides guidance to diversity trainers who want to conduct workshops that move beyond personal awareness to building specific skills and cultural competency. The manual includes sections on Models of Cultural Competency, Communication, Conflict Resolution, Team Building, Giving Effective Feedback, and Individual/Organizational Action Planning.

Doyle, Michael and David Straus. *How to Make Meetings Work.* New York: The Berkeley Publishing Group, 1976.

This standard guidebook demonstrates how time and people can be better used in meetings for any organization – from large corporations to the PTA.

Kelsey, Dee and Pam Plumb. *Great Meetings! How to Facilitate Like a Pro.* Portland, Maine: Hanson Park Press, 1997.

This is a user-friendly resource book designed to help meeting leaders, facilitators, and participants understand the important steps for planning and facilitating a great meeting. It is also a useful text for facilitation and meeting-management training.

Team Building

Berkowitz, Bill, and Tom Wolff. *The Spirit of the Coalition.* American Public Health Association: 2000.

The authors have been involved in creating, leading, and consulting to community coalitions for more than fifteen years. The book offers guidance on starting and operating a community coalition. It consists of stories of experienced coalition leaders woven together with explanatory text and summarizing lessons. Actual documents used by the coalition leaders are also included.

Chrislip David D., and Carl E. Larson. *Collaborative Leadership: How Citizens and Civic Leaders Can Make a Difference.* Jossey-Bass: 1994.

Drawing on extensive research, as well as on the advice and guidance of leading scholars and practitioners in the field, the authors show how elected officials and other civic leaders can generate the civic will to break through legislative and bureaucratic gridlock, deal with complex issues, and engage frustrated and angry citizens. They also describe how to design, initiate, and sustain a constructive, collaborative process.

Morse, Suzanne. *Building Collaborative Communities.* Pew Partnership for Civic Change: 1996.

This essay includes practical tips on how to encourage and support dialogue and collaboration in communities. It details key elements required for growing healthy collaboratives and is based on the author's wide range of foundation and community experience.

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